# In the City, Out of Place: Dispossession and the Economics of Belonging in Southeastern Turkey

# In the City, Out of Place:
# Dispossession and the Economics of Belonging in Southeastern Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

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Dispossession and the Economics of Belonging

This dissertation analyzes everyday talk about livelihoods, or about the challenges of work and getting by, among displaced Kurds in the city of Diyarbakır in southeastern Turkey. Over the past two decades, Diyarbakır has grown dramatically with the influx of tens of thousands of displaced and dispossessed rural Kurds uprooted by state policies of forced migration. These policies were designed with two strategic aims in mind: eliminating rural support networks for the Kurdish armed rebellion (the PKK), and concentrating populations in less dispersed and thus theoretically more easily policed spaces. However, it is argued here that while the former ambition has perhaps succeeded, the displacement and dispossession of rural Kurds throughout the 1990s, rather than suppressing dissent, has generated new fields and new forms of political struggle. Based on two years of fieldwork in Diyarbakır, this study explores the ways in which ordinary talk about livelihoods, about how to make a living and pay the bills, is, in this context, about more than 'the economy' alone. The interplay of people's efforts to rebuild life and livelihood and the semiotic interpretation of these efforts is analyzed as a rich and under-appreciated site for the everyday practical generation of the political in Kurdish Turkey. This study contributes to the anthropology of Kurdish Turkey and of the Middle East, as well as to theories of displacement and dispossession, evaluative discourse, and the pragmatics of political stance.

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*In loving memory of*
Bill and Marie Ringle

# INTRODUCTION

> In eight years, I visited nearly all of Anatolia, and of the cities I saw, Diyarbakır has no match. You look at the grandeur of the walls and the good manners of its people and you say, like Rome, like Istanbul, here is a city that has always been home to a genteel population. Then you see its new buildings, modern facilities…and its accommodation to change through an intertwining of scholarship, learning, arts, and culture, and you say, here is west...In terms of its liveliness and crowds, no city east of Gaziantep and Kayseri can measure up. Its wide roads, rich trading houses, vineyards and gardens, and active markets are growing day by day, flourishing day by day.
>
> —Journalist and author Cahit Beğenç, *Diyarbakır ve Raman*, 1949

> Diyarbakır was, in its days of splendor, the shining star of the East, and, located at the crossroads of trade routes, was a center of history, culture, dialogue, business, and cuisine…[Today] it is a city where joblessness and the illegal tapping of electricity both push 70 percent.
>
> —MÜSİAD, *Bölgesel-Sektörel Sorunlar ve Çözüm Önerileri,* 2005

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Turkish state was engaged in armed struggle with Kurdish revolutionaries fighting for an independent state. Among the most significant legacies of this period is the mass displacement of rural Kurds. In the first half of the 1990s, some 3,000 villages and hamlets were forcibly evacuated, some by Kurdish guerrillas (Bruinessen 1999), and many more by the Turkish army (Jongerden 2001; Mater 1999; Bruinessen 1995; Olson 1989; Amnesty International 1996). An unknown number of rural Kurds—estimates range from official figures of approximately one million (HÜNEE 2006) to figures from civil society groups that place the number closer to 3 million (TİHV 2001) or, at the high end, 4 million (GÖÇ-DER 2009)[1]—were compelled to abandon life and livelihood in the countryside. Cities across southeastern

[1] See also Bilgin and Yükseker (2005) and HRW (2002, 2005) for a discussion of these discrepancies. The following chapter will explore this politics of numbers in more detail.

Turkey saw their populations rise dramatically with the influx of tens of thousands of displaced families. And today, nearly two decades after the transformative events of the 1990s, these cities are still struggling to address the social and economic effects of displacement.

At a very general level, this dissertation is devoted to exploring the aftermath of this recent history of displacement and dispossession through an ethnographic account of economic and political life in Diyarbakır—one of the largest cities in southeastern Turkey and a major magnet for forced migrants in the 1990s. Specifically, I focus in this study on everyday talk about 'livelihood', or the challenges of work and getting by among displaced Kurds in Diyarbakır. I will argue across the study that this talk is not only about how to make a living and pay the bills, but about the modes of power Kurds in Turkey are subjected to at this time in their history, and the forms of political dissensus (Ranciere 2010) emerging therefrom. The aim of this introduction is to unpack this claim, both empirically and theoretically. First, however, let us turn to a brief overview of the history and political economy of Diyarbakır.

## DIYARBAKIR

With a current population of a little under 1 million, Diyarbakır is located some 70 miles north of the Syrian border, and approximately 180 and 300 miles, respectively, from the main border points into Iraq and Iran. Its ancient city walls, delimiting the historic urban center, are built at the edge of a basalt plateau on the banks of the Tigris River, overlooking an impressive stretch of plain, a patchwork of fields of wheat and pulses. In its denominational and ethno-linguistic composition, the city was, until the early twentieth century at least, remarkably varied. Nineteenth-century population

estimates, derived from Ottoman *salname*s and Armenian Patriarchate figures, differ widely, for reasons tied to the interests of compilers. Whatever the precise figures, though, the city's historical heterogeneity is undeniable. Sunni Muslims, Gregorian Armenians, Catholic Armenians, Syrian Christians, Jacobites, Chaldaeans, Protestants, Orthodox Rum, and Catholic Rum, Yezidis, Jews, and Gypsies—all appear in Diyarbakır's 19th-century population estimates (Jongerden 2007:234-5, Yılmazçelik 1995:115). As for its linguistic composition, a mixture of Turkish and Kurdish seem to have been used throughout much of the Ottoman period, though in addition to Kurmanji and Diyarbakır's particular dialect of Turkish (closer in certain features to Baku than Istanbul), travelers also noted the use of Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Aramaic dialects, and the Iranian language Zazaki (Bruinessen 1988: 29).

In Diyarbakır today, constructions of the city's past as one of cosmopolitan openness and peaceful coexistence (a fairly familiar trope in contemporary representations of Ottoman life) are easy to come across, both in everyday conversation and in the rhetoric of local politicians. Nor is this trope entirely without substance.[2] But here as elsewhere, under the right political circumstances, harmonious communal relations easily transformed into communal discord.[3] By the end of the chaotic decades

[2] In a brief digression on Ottoman tolerance and the much-discussed *millet* system, Slavoj Zizek (2006)—an odd reference in Ottoman history, to be sure, but the passage merits attention—relays a fascinating account by a 15th century Italian traveler to Ottoman Istanbul who is repelled by the close coexistence of so many different religious and cultural communities. Zizek underscores the irony here, at least when read from the 21st century: certain mainstream discourses in European politics tend to frame Islamic geographies as marked by problems of intolerance of religious and ethnic difference, yet here is a traveler from Europe in the heart of the Ottoman Empire, expressing disgust in the face of just such differences. He goes on to suggest that, popular theories of age-old aggression or tribal sensibilities aside, it was not only local dynamics that prompted the great political disasters of the Anatolian early twentieth century and the Balkan late, but the influx of certain European-born ideas, namely nationalism and an ethnicized notion of nation and national people.

[3] It was a surprise to encounter the openness with which many of my fieldwork collaborators discussed their families' direct involvement with the violent expulsion of the city's Armenian population. On this

around World War I, nearly all of the city's significant non-Muslim population had either been exiled or killed, or had converted.[4] This other, earlier history of forced migration in Diyarbakır, inaugurating the city into the new political form of the nation state, had lasting effects on not only the social composition of the city, but also on its economic life, as a vast majority of the city's artisans and craftsmen were Armenian and Assyrian. Prior to World War I, Diyarbakır, aided by its position on trade routes linking Mosul, Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo, Damascus, and Iran and the Caucuses to Istanbul and other Anatolian nodes, was an important regional center of trade and small-scale craft production, particularly in textiles—a craft mostly carried out by Armenians, who engaged in household production in and around the city (Barkan 1943, Quataert 1993). Diyarbakır's textiles were prized across Europe, as was its unique red leather (Bruinessen 1988:42). Leather came from pastoralists in the fertile hinterlands, the same lands that met Aleppo's need for meat (Yılmazçelik 1995:13-5). Further, taxes on caravans from Iran or from India via Baghdad, particularly on silk (Bruinessen 1988:36-7), collected in the city's active customs house and sent to Istanbul, made Diyarbakır a significant source of revenue for the Ottoman state. Other specialized crafts in which Armenians and Assyrians predominated include the production of swords and daggers and a range of iron and copper goods. Relics of fortress gates, nails, and cannonballs crafted in Diyarbakır are found across contemporary Iraq and Syria (Murphey 1980).[5]

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history as it touched down in Diyarbakır, see Joost Jongerden's *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir* 1870-1915 (2012).

[4] For one of the few examples of a micro-historical approach to the violent events in and around Diyarbakır at that time, see Jongerden (2008, 2012).

[5] The urban space of the old walled city-center still shows signs of this deep history of trade. Impressive trading inns (*hanlar*), which one 17th-century traveler (Simeon 2007) estimated as having stables capable of housing 500 animals, elicited comparisons, in terms of economic vitality, to Istanbul. Also, a number of the markets and districts that grew up around long-standing crafts and trade specialties

Yet as with many urban centers in Turkey that, historically cosmopolitan in composition, lost much of their artisan and craftsmen classes during the demographic transformations in the shift from empire to nation, Diyarbakır's economy was severely impacted by the demographic transformations of World War I. Sociologist Çağlar Keyder describes these economic changes with specific reference to eastern Turkey:

> Geographical differentiation had been an important feature of the Ottoman era, and agronomic differences among regions were probably always important, but there is justification to think that the nineteenth-century expansion of export trade added to the advantage enjoyed by more fertile areas. During the late century, commercial development seems to have spread to previously less fortunate regions in eastern Anatolia, whose cities evolved as secondary centres under the enrichment of especially the Armenian population. One gets the impression of a declining regional inequality in the decades preceding the Great War. Given the economic consequences of the radical population upheaval during the wars, however, it is likely that there was substantially greater regional inequality (roughly along east-west lines) in the early Republic than in the late Empire. [1987: 205-6]

Population upheavals in the decades around World War I quite simply devastated Diyarbakır's economy. Forms of extreme social suffering, including near-starvation poverty and epidemics, marked this period, and though conditions in the early Republic (1923-1950) were an improvement on these conditions, in the subsequent decades, regardless of the optimism with which early Republican discourse,[6] represented by Beğenç's quote at the outset of the chapter, spoke about the riches and promise of the city, Diyarbakır never recovered its previous centrality as a site of industrial production

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are still evident, though in diminished form: jewelers, traders in herbs and dry goods, shoemakers, saddle makers, and other leatherworkers, textile merchants (in particular, scarves), blacksmiths, and carpenters.

[6] I read Begenç and other similar writers of the period in part for their records of city life in the early twentieth century, but more for a structure of feeling that can be described as ambition and optimism for the construction of a nationalist project of countermemory. Biray Kırlı has compellingly described a broadly similar project in the context of Izmir, where in the wake of a great fire and the forced migration of nearly all of the city's non-Muslims (and thus, there too, most of its craftsmen and merchants) the emerging nationalist ideology saw opportunity in disaster, initiating an "attempt to build places of (counter)memory, to open up a hollow landscape upon which the new nation's imprint, its Muslim and Turkish identity, could be carved" (2002: 21-22).

and export. It rather re-emerged as a regional node of limited, small-scale trade and industry, much of it in textiles and the processing of agricultural goods.

In the early 20th century, a number of rural Kurdish families moved from the country to the city after World War I. Some took over crafts previously dominated by Armenians (Mango 2004). Others worked as small shopkeepers and merchants in agricultural goods, as public investments in the city's infrastructure for storing and exporting agricultural yields and in agricultural mechanization in the 1950s led to an expanded production of commodity crops such as wheat and red lentils in Diyarbakır's hinterlands, opening up more spaces for trade. Yet the economic life of the city remained at a small scale across the twentieth century, with no large industrial development to speak of. State-led industrial development policies in the 1960s, which tended to favor areas with some degree of infrastructural development and networks of businessmen with links to the state (Istanbul, İzmir, and the Çukurova Plain) for the most part bypassed Diyarbakır.

This process of marginalization not only intensified geographical inequities across Turkey. It also seems to have played an important role in spreading popular perceptions of unequal development in Turkey (Keyder 1987:206). The history of unequal industrial development persists in Diyarbakır today, both at the level of empirical materialities of industrialization and popular perceptions of inequality. One widespread form of economic common sense that I came across frequently in my research interprets this history as one of intentional economic underdevelopment; limiting economic development, so the theory goes, is a means of both limiting the potential emergence of political power and maintaining a relation of exploitative extraction—what the

controversial sociologist İsmail Beşikçi (1969) analyzed in terms of internal colonialism. Yet it is also possible, and perhaps more plausible, to see the emergence of the present economic conjuncture as resulting from an assemblage of factors whose complexity exceeds the positing of an intentional state project of underdevelopment. This equation includes existing infrastructure, historically embedded economic activities (in this case, largely small-scale subsistence farming and pastoralism in much of the countryside, interspersed by larger-scale farming of export crops, and in the cities, small-scale craft production and trade), and political histories of allegiance with and challenge to 20th-century efforts to naturalize the nation-state form across Anatolia. Though messier than the idea of state intentions, this would seem to provide a more careful framing of why Diyarbakır never was the site of significant capitalist development.

Such was the general economic context that forced migrants encountered when they began to arrive in great numbers in the early 1990s: a city of small-scale merchants and traders, and, on the whole, small scales of wealth. Before migration, we find a city rendered, by its turbulent path through the twentieth century, an economically marginal urban space in a largely economically marginal region.[7]

It is hardly surprising, then, that high rates of joblessness and urban poverty have resulted from this history of disrupt and decline. Countless small shops now operate either entirely beyond or in a negotiated relationship with the rituals of economic

[7] That said, for reasons that I shall try to illustrate below through ethnographic detail and analysis, marginality is not synonymous with of no consequence. See Das and Poole (2004) for a collection of nuanced essays on how the margins of the state shape, in important ways, the center. Specific to southeastern Turkey, Watts (2010) and Gambetti (2009) for studies of the extent to which political events and different eras of activism in Kurdish Turkey have reshaped the Turkish state.

formality.[8] Street vendors and sidewalk sellers seize on busy intersections and trafficked spaces. And a significant proportion of households rely on money earned from seasonal, temporary work in off-the-books spaces of labor: for men, construction work in western Turkish metropoles stands out; for women, cleaning; and for entire families, manual agricultural labor, in the Black Sea's hazelnut groves, in Urfa or Çukurova's cotton fields, or elsewhere across Turkey's centers of commercial agricultural production.

If this suggests something of the social and economic trajectory of the city, another critical element, without which any portrait of Diyarbakır would be incomplete, involves Diyarbakır's increasing identity, particularly after the 1960s, as a key regional center for Kurdish political activism and dissent. (Though early twentieth-century forms of Kurdish politics, rebellions religious and separatist in character, took place in and around Diyarbakır (Olson 1989), here I am focusing only on those with a more direct genealogy to the contemporary contours of the city's political life.) This grew in part from the increasing popularity of leftist politics across Turkey in the 1960s. Divisions over how to address the so-called Kurdish Question led to the emergence of groups that blended calls for economic and political equality with ideas of Kurdish rights and separatism (on this history, see Bila 2004, Bozarslan 2004, Jongerden and Akkaya 2011). A number of organizations and journals emerged from this period, where matters of Kurdish cultural and political aspirations were discussed with a degree of openness unmatched in previous periods. By the end of the 1960s, Diyarbakır was an important center for the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths, a Kurdish socialist group that

[8] And to be sure, the 'formal' in invocations of economic formality should be appreciated as a fundamentally cultural question (Ferguson 2007, Guyer 2004), as instances of "fictions taken as reality" (Taussig 1984)—and fictions, crucially, inseparable from questions of the unequal distribution of power—imposed on the human act of exchange.

influenced some of the PKK's early ideas.

That discussions of Kurdish identity and aspirations, equality, rights, and justice, and state actions of discrimination and assimilation are as widespread in Diyarbakir as they are today is in part a consequence of the discussions initiated at this time. Today, Diyarbakır is a political city in still another sense. Since the early 2000s, after two decades of struggle, leaders of the Kurdish movement have rejected the idea of an independent Kurdish state, and have instead been investing thought and effort in a project of democracy without the state—of building spaces of political experimentation at levels that, in line with its project of radical democratic autonomy, do not rely on a state for the realization of aims. Neither an independent Kurdish state, nor recognition from the Turkish state animate contemporary politics in Diyarbakır. Rather, the aim of creating or occupying existing spaces in local government or civil society organizations, where Kurdish political and cultural expression might be less encumbered. And within this emergent project, Diyarbakır's status is something of an unofficial political capital.

We will take up and add to this sketch of the city in the following chapters. Let us now turn to describing in more detail the object of analysis central to this study.

## OBJECT OF ANALYSIS

"Poverty", notes a prominent Diyarbakır-based NGO, "has in recent years become one of the most visible, as well as most discussed and debated, facts of urban life in Diyarbakır" (Sarmaşık 2009:2). In 2007, when I arrived in the city to commence two years of fieldwork, the ubiquity with which reflection on problems of joblessness, dispossession, and the economic obligations of the state to the welfare of its citizens filtered into everyday talk was a social fact that, it seemed, could not be overlooked, if for

no other reason than its sheer social pervasiveness. Such talk seemed, in one form or another, to find a way into so many everyday semiotic acts, from chatter in corner stores and restaurants to headlines in the local newspapers, or to the ethnographic interviews I was carrying out (and in the instance of the latter, sometimes almost regardless, it seemed, of the questions I asked). Displaced households I visited to collect family histories of migration and shifting livelihoods lamented in one breath the lack of factories in the city—*bir fabrika olsaydı,* if only there were a factory, is a phrase that surfaced far more times in my fieldwork than I could possibly count—and put forward, in the next, theories alleging a link between displacement and dispossession and contemporary national-governmental practices of food and fuel assistance, maintaining that both are part of a single, intentional strategy of depoliticization, first through impoverishment, then through forced dependency. Young men I spent time with as they worked in neighborhood bakeries, markets, grills and other self-employment ventures common to the dispossessed accurately relayed statistics on the city's unemployment rates as they shared their own stories of work in sites across Turkey's seasonal and temporary labor geographies of dispossession, or lamented their precarious prospects for building a stable working future in Diyarbakır. Small-scale merchants and traders I interviewed and spent time with, looking over their shoulder as they went about their daily business, compared the regular promises from Ankara, which tend to cluster around two master keywords in longstanding national-governmental discourses about economic development in the southeast—investment (*yatırım*) and development (*kalkınma*)—and accused the state of a lack of sincerity when it came to implementing effectual policies of economic improvement in its Kurdish geographies. Bored bus drivers distracted themselves on

near-empty late buses by chatting up lone passengers like me, asking rhetorically how there could be such regional resource riches alongside such widespread poverty and joblessness—the implied answer having to do, in the perceptions of many people I met in the city, with a history of state neglect at best, intentional underdevelopment at worst.

There is nothing automatic or natural, I think, about the frequency with which matters of the economy were brought into daily speech. This brings us to the object of analysis: the particularly widespread public discourse in Diyarbakır about the economy (or livelihood and economic privations) among displaced Kurds. An important aim of this study is to grasp its contours. Critically, though, I further argue that, in its pragmatic application in contemporary Diyarbakır, discourse about the economy is also a discourse about politics. That is, discourse about livelihood has a primary referential meaning having to do with matters of economic life, but in its pragmatic application, is used, in a Rancierean sense of the politics of dissensus (2010), to stake out a stance of objection to the current state of affairs—an act of interpretation that then re-shapes what is being said as other than or more than economic. In talking about high unemployment rates or the challenges of making a living after dispossession, in other words, people were raising fundamentally political questions: What is the state's obligation towards its citizens? To what extent is the state (as opposed to the market) responsible for helping citizens who are undergoing privation—importantly, for reasons they perceive to be caused by state acts? Can the state be relied on as an enforcer of justice? Or should other political horizons be invested in?

To clarify this analysis, two points need to be addressed, one analytical, one theoretical. Firstly, why approach politics through a discussion of economic life in the

first place? There is no self-evident reason, after all, why economic matters provide the referential material for what Jacques Ranciere calls "litigious speech", or acts of disagreement with a particular sociopolitical order of things (2010). Secondly, how precisely does discourse about the economy matter politically? This study's focus on discourse about the economy stems from my conviction that all this talk is not 'mere talk', incidental to a somehow more real, more significant field of human action, but has an impact on how people understand themselves as political actors, and how they act on these understandings. To explore this latter point requires a theoretical framework for thinking about the relationship between discourse and political stance. But let us begin with the question: Why politics through the economic?

The reasons why discourses about the economy have become so widespread are fairly clear, and have to do with the nature of the state's encounter with Kurds in the region over the past thirty years (the details of which we shall explore in more detail in the following chapter), and the overlap of this political history with a deeper economic history of geographical inequities, economic marginalization, and decline. The forms of destabilized livelihoods and impoverishment resulting from this history seem to have acted as incitements to discourse (Foucault 1978). Yet this still does not answer why people approach the political through economic matters. A reader unfamiliar with this context may wonder, might this be an instance of playing it safe? Might people be sticking to the subject of poverty and problems of joblessness because of state censorship that makes discussion and criticism of the Kurdish question difficult, if not impossible in public, and so people have to discuss it indirectly, the economy being the discourse at hand by which to do so? The short answer is no. Certainly, the history of state

censorship around Kurdish political and cultural expression contains many actions surprising in their reach and occasional absurdity.[9] And while it is inaccurate to say that Turkey is now living in a post-censorship era with regards to how the state treats public expressions of Kurdishness,[10] official restrictions on discussion of the Kurdish question have, over roughly the past decade, undergone some changes, even if these changes are frequently diagnosed as cosmetic and contradictory to the mass arrests of Kurdish public officials and the detention of hundreds of Kurdish youths. If there were points in the past when Diyarbakırites were reticent to discuss the so-called Kurdish question openly, today the need to shroud discussion is less pressing. One did not have to go far, in my comparatively brief stay in the city, to encounter vigorous political debate in everyday conversations in the city. People criticized past policies denying the existence of Kurdish language and culture, diagnosed deep injustice in destructive state policies in Kurdish geographies, and scoured the latest news for signs of state sincerity (or lack thereof) in announcing a new economic development package or new promises of political reform. People attended political rallies and turned out to vote for the Kurdish party in large

[9] The history of censorship is remarkable in its semiotic span. The most infamous instance is the ban on the public use of Kurdish in education and broadcasting, in effect until quite recently in Turkey, and still in effect in de facto ways, such as the orthographic ban on the use of W, Q, and X, which do not exist in the Turkish alphabet. Being caught, at a rally or in a police house raid, with a red, yellow, and green scarf—the "national" colors of Kurds—can land one in trouble. And, for similar reasons of color politics, twice during my research the police in Diyarbakır ordered the uprooting of flower beds planted by the municipality, in one instance because the colors (red and yellow flowers, green leaves) were perceived as a public display of Kurdish nationalist symbolism, and in the other, because a star-shaped arrangement of flowers in a roundabout reminded the police of a Kurdish flag. (See Haber Diyarbakır 2008 and Evrensel 2008 for wry commentaries on these events.) One NGO worker I met with often recalled two instances where a bouquet of flowers landed her in trouble with the police, the red and yellow blooms taken as PKK propaganda. In addition to flowers and orthography, preoccupation with toponyms (Today's Zaman 2012), clothing (Amnesty Internationl 1997), and cats (Los Angeles Times 2002) are also a part of the semiotic history of the aesthetics of politics in Kurdish Turkey.

[10] The question of recognition is far more complex than simply opening up discursive spaces for Kurds, such as the much-discussed Kurdish language television channel (TRT 6) opened by state broadcasters in 2009. See Povinelli (2002) for a brilliant ethnographic and theoretical treatment of the concept of recognition in the context of multicultural Australia.

numbers. Talk about the need for expanded political and cultural rights is a salient element of contemporary Kurdish public political discourse, and the question of who might be expected to ensure these rights—should people wait on the state for deep structural reforms, or should local government and civil society organizations begin mobilizing outside of sanctioned means?—is a regular feature of everyday life in Diyarbakır.

Rather than an instance of avoiding controversial subjects, talk of politics through matters of economic life might have more to do with the return of a neglected and misrepresented issue. Questions of economic inequality in the Kurdish countryside and its cities played an important role in discussions among Kurdish leftist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. The PKK, too, in its early years in particular, made rural land reforms and the elimination of the region's large landlords—whom the PKK framed as state collaborators, targeting a number of prominent landlords in their early attacks—a central part of its early strategy. Yet in the changes that emerged across the 1990s, and more explicitly in the 2000s—from separatism to democratic autonomy, or what two scholars of the PKK describe as "radical democracy based on a rejection of the state" (Akkaya and Jongerden 2010)—only recently has there re-emerged sustained attention to re-thinking the economy. As one Kurdish journalist recently noted, "In a period when the subject of autonomy has occupied the political agenda, it is quite troubling that discussion about the economy [at an official level] has not been as sufficient as it should be. Since the foundation of the Kurdish movement, the field of least intervention has been the economy" (Pelda n.d.).

The question of geographical economic inequalities has, in fact, been a point of discussion at times in local politics in the southeast, but in less than beneficial ways. For at least three decades, official Turkish governmental discourse has favored an explanation of political instability in the southeast as a question not of ethnic or political problems, but economic underdevelopment (Marcus 2007:281). The clear problem with such an approach is that it brackets the political production of contemporary forms of urban poverty in favor of a technical, apolitical vision of economic development and humanitarian aid (*pace* Referans Gazetesi 2008, see Day 2008). This framing of things, however, has drawn plenty of critical attention. The Kurdish party, not without its own shortsightedness and impasses in certain aspects of its approach to urban poverty in the southeast—for instance, are not the frequent calls of local government officials for more capital investment in a region (as those who voice these calls often note) with abundant cheap labor an invitation for capital to proletarianize the displaced and dispossessed?—built an election in 2009 in part on the rejection of such a reduced framework for thinking about Kurdish politics as mainly a matter of hungry bellies, insisting instead that matters of identity and ethnicity were indispensable.

But with more consistency and articulateness, it is forced migrants who are responsible for sustaining questions of the politics of economic life in Kurdish Turkey. There are likely two reasons for this. One is simply their constant, direct experience with the effects of displacement, dispossession, and regional economies structured on geographical inequity. Another lies in the fact that, in many instances, Kurdish political activism has, since the 1980s, been a part of their lives, in one way or another. I interviewed a number of older men who recalled with fondness how PKK guerrillas

would descend from the mountains to their hamlets to convene small meetings in the name of consciousness raising and an effort to convince rural Kurds of the righteousness of the cause, a process that Aliza Marcus's (2007) work describes as going against the widespread idea that the PKK relied mainly on coercion to gain support. Moreover, people did not cut their relationship with the Kurdish movement upon coming to the city. The poor and displaced make up a very important part of the legal Kurdish party BDP's electoral base, and turn out in large numbers in rallies and protests, discuss and digest political discourse from different sources, and vote in routinely high numbers. It is perhaps not surprising that those experiencing economic strife most closely are those who sustain, as an element of public discourse, the economic angle of the political critique of recent Kurdish dissensus. One point I try to make throughout this study is that, rather than see this through an alarmist lens—urban poverty plus political critique, will it equal political unrest?—the keeping alive of a political discourse of the economy, informed by the experiences of the displaced, can be seen as having the potential to inform the emerging discussions around urban poverty in contemporary Kurdish Turkey. A grounded understanding of poverty, one informed by the dispossessed themselves, might inject new perspectives into tired calls for more factories, more investment, or better state incentive packages, and enrich discussions of building an "autonomous economy" (DTK n.d.). But here we are already entering into theoretical questions we must address in the next section, in which we consider in more general terms how this ubiquity of discourse about the economy might matter politically.

## CONCEPTS: MATERIALISM, DISCOURSE, POLITICS

Here we take up in more theoretical terms the claim that frequent discourse about the economy might play a role in how people understand themselves as political actors. Doing so requires us to consider the relations between material practice and the role of language—specifically, discourse—in the constitution of what I will refer to throughout this study as political stance. I shall come to an explanation of why I am using the term stance rather than political subjectivity or consciousness, but first let us consider the relationship between materialism and discourse.

Marx's materialism provides a framework for appreciating consciousness as a product of sensuous engagement with the world. In a well-known passage in the *German Ideology*, criticizing methods that start with ideas and proceed to actual situations—methods that "descend from heaven to earth" (1970:47)—Marx and Engels advocate another approach:

> We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process, we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process…Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. [1970: 47]

In this sense of materialism, how we imagine or conceive of the world has, to a significant degree, to do with the nature or mode of our engagement with the world around us, with context—ideas as "echoes" of experience. But Marx had relatively little to say in detail about the role of language as a link between material practice and the concepts we hold of the world. It was other students of the methodological project he outlined who identified language as a critical medium between material context and mind. Bakhtin-circle theorist of language V.N. Volosinov insisted that language is not

best approached, *pace* Saussure, as an "abstract system of normatively identical forms of language" (1973: 70), but should be placed in actual contexts of usage. And in so doing, he says, the analyst of language quickly sees the extent to which language is deeply inflected by context. Furthermore, says Volosinov, language is, from the point of view of grounded speakers, a practical activity where meaning and evaluation are inseparable; thus Volosinov's felicitous observation that all words have an "evaluative accent" (1973:80-81). Language, he notes

> exists for the speaker only in the context of specific utterances, exists, consequently, only in a specific ideological context. In actuality, we never say or hear words, we say and hear what is true and false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology. That is the way we understand words, and we can respond only to words that engage us behaviorally or ideologically. [1973:70]

Language thus has "the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change" (1973:19). This echoes Bakhtin's insights into the ways in which language (or languages within a language) encode "particular views of the world". "All words", Bakhtin wrote, "have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (1981:293). This study is framed by such an approach to language as both deeply inflected by—or in Bakhtin's felicitous phrase, tasting of—its context, and also used as the main means for assigning value to that context. Here, the focus is not on individual words or signs, however, but on longer chains of speech, discourse, through which evaluative stances vis-à-vis context are articulated.

But how does this process link to politics? How is the evaluative function of speech in context related to political life? Volosinov's framework does much to push the study of language beyond a Saussurean concern with language as a self-contained system, and towards an appreciation of language as fundamentally inextricable from social conditions, or from the "extraverbal milieu" (Volosinov 1986:96) in which he insists we must ground language. But in theorizing politics, Volosinov's approach does not open up much in the way of analytical space. Politics is mentioned in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* either to refer to politics in the sense of government, or to the ways in which what Volosinov refers to as the "sociopolitical order" inflects language (where sociopolitical order is largely synonymous with the differentiation of society into distinct classes). Here we need another thinker, one still operating within the framework of historical materialism, but presenting an approach to politics through discourse, through a more robust theorization of the political: Jacques Ranciere.

Ranciere's theorization of politics begins with the distinction that he draws between police and the political. The former designates, for Ranciere, a particular social order's fixed "distribution of the sensible", a phrase Ranciere uses across his work to suggest how power works to render certain voices or agents as relatively more audible and visible, and others as beyond the perceivable, sensible borders—this is his sense of "aesthetics of politics"—of what is recognized as intelligible speech about and legitimate participation in deciding on the shape of society or community. Society and community are more or less synonymous in his conceptual vocabulary, and denote not a mediating element in the constitution of a political order, but the outcome of active disagreements and disputes about the shape that the social or communal should take. Those rare

moments when the intelligibility of a particular arrangement of the social and the legitimacy of the assumptions it rests upon—particularly, who is qualified to contribute to its definition—are called into question are, for Ranciere, politics. The political begins, he writes, "when the status of the subject able and ready to concern itself with the community becomes an issue" (Ranciere 2010: 43). As an "intervention in the visible and sayable" (Ranciere 2001), politics "consists not in acts that preserve a political order or respond to already articulated problems, but in the disrupt of this order of the distribution of bodies" (Ranciere 2004: 99)—a distribution, again, that governs who can and cannot have a say in the making of a community, in the definition of a social order. Politics marks those moments—rare, their reasons for emergence not easily predicted, and their results provisional and precarious, says Ranciere—when "community is animated by the very conflict over what [community] means" (2010: 100), and when the arbitrariness of a particular distribution of power is laid bare and publicly thrown into question.

However rare, and however ambiguous and precarious their results may be—the interrogation of the intelligibility and legitimacy of a particular arrangement of things, however much it may rely on concepts of justice or equality, does not, even if the interrogators take power, necessarily result in the formation of a more just and egalitarian order—Ranciere nevertheless emphasizes that such acts of throwing the social order into question effect the broadening of who counts as a political actor, of those who count as "beings with names", and those who take part in such acts of collective questioning, Ranciere suggests, find "through transgression…that they too are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence" (Bennett 2010:

106). Thus Ranciere presents a framework for appreciating instances where speech is tasked with making visible and sayable that which a particular configuration of power renders less available to the senses, less easily perceived.

"Litigious speech" being a phrase Ranciere often uses to condense his concept of the political, it is perhaps not surprising that responses to his work have questioned the limits of conceiving of political action as a matter of primarily linguistic action. Is the political mainly a matter of speech? When questioned on just this issue by political theorist Jane Bennett, Ranciere maintained his position that political life is indeed primarily about deliberation and disagreement—for Ranciere, a fundamentally linguistic act (2010:106). Bennett's own work offers a fascinating expansion on Ranciere's approach, taking the political well beyond not only speech, but beyond humans: to electricity grids, food systems, and worm castings. I am sympathetic to a line of thinking that stresses the importance of expanding our appreciation of the political beyond acts of language. In that framework, particularly relevant to this research site, and a theme explored by a number of social and political scientists writing on Diyarbakır and its environs (Jongerden 2007, Gambetti 2009), is that of the role of space, and its status, following Lefebvre (2009) as both product of and agent in politics. This is an indubitably important research focus. And at an implicit level anyhow, the extra-verbal and extra-human have a place in the ethnography that follows, where one can see evidence of the ways in which the political extends beyond speech to questions of land, fruits of the land, home interiors, and more. That said, at least in this iteration of the fieldwork material,[11] the theoretical focus is more singularly devoted to the role of evaluative acts of language in the shaping of political stance.

[11] See the conclusion for a return to the absence of matters of space and geography.

Which brings us to a question we began with: why stance? Why approach this material through that concept, instead of, say, more familiar terms such as consciousness or subjectivity?

In *A Grammar of Motives*, literary theorist Kenneth Burke, in an exploration of what he calls the stance family in Indo-Germanic languages, identifies a fascinating tension embedded in the idea of stance. Although we use stance to point to what a person or thing is—where someone or something stands—its etymological roots in fact lie in an "attribute of the thing's context…that which supports or underlies a thing"—namely, "scene, environment, situation, context, ground" (1969:23-5). Burke brilliantly identifies "how readily we shunt between an intrinsic and an extrinsic reference" in talking about stance, and it is this capacity of the term that I want to underscore. Stance at a basic level points not only to the intrinsic qualities of the person standing, but also to the context by and in—or against—which she stands.

Stance has also been the focus of linguistic anthropologists (e.g. Jaffe 2012). As Paul Kockelman notes (2005:129-31), in a brief but informative review, uses of the term stance in linguistic anthropology range greatly in terms of the object or focus of stance (a speaker's stance to language use, to ethics, to the perceived truthfulness of a statement, and more) and the means for studying stance (grammatical categories, discourse). Across the variation, though, he notes a common move away "from an emphasis on the private, subjective, and psychological…to an emphasis on the public, intersubjective, and embodied (stance)" (2005: 131). This study is similarly concerned with a move away from the intrinsic to the shared and public. Unlike Kockelman's research, however—his study is concerned with language at the level of grammar, not discourse—I am mainly

concerned with public discourse wherein the economy (a shorthand here for questions of joblessness, livelihood precariousness, and related matters) is put to both moral and political use. A framework combining Ranciere's insights on the politics of dissensus with an appreciation, with Volosinov, of how "every utterance is above all an evaluative orientation" (1973:105), pushes us to an understanding of how, in everyday speech, political stances are staked out through instances of evaluation and conviction. Talk about the economy, as I trace it across this study, acts in this context to index political events and histories, and to do so through an evaluative framework of right and wrong, just and unjust. Ethnographic attention to stance, conceptualized in this way, seems at once more modest and demonstrable than the reshaping of subjectivities—by virtue of its being less concerned with interiority than with the public manifestations of the shunting between the intrinsic and extrinsic that Burke notes—yet of no less political and analytical import.

This framework suggests a way of appreciating the ways in which Kurdish forced migrants, rather than having been stripped of their political lives and made to barely live (Agamben 1998), have taken issue with the conditions of the post-dispossession city, and through it, are engaging in acts of dissensus that challenge the state of affairs. We shall take up this framework across the following chapters. First, though, a note on research methods and a brief overview of the chapters.

## METHODS

The analysis that follows draws on two years of fieldwork in Diyarbakır, from the summer of 2007 until that of 2009. One component of fieldwork was semi-structured

interviews, conducted mostly in Turkish, though with a few in Kurmanji, and totaling just under 50 in number. The majority of these interviews were carried out with displaced newcomers, and included both one-on-one interviews (usually carried out in either teahouses or next to street stands, semi-legal shops, or other spaces of displaced self-employment) and household visits. The overarching aim of this part of my research was to collect oral accounts of forced migration and subsequent livelihood histories. Standard questions included:

- How did you get by in the countryside?
- Describe a normal working day.
- How often, if ever, did you come to the city, and if so, to do what?
- Talk about how you came to Diyarbakır in the 1990s.
- In the process of forced migration, what did you lose (how), what was destroyed (by whom), and what could you sell (to whom), and was anything seized (if so how?)
- Describe life in the first year or two after migration. That is, once in the city, how did you find a place to live, and how did you get by in those first few years?

In time, I learned to let my interlocutors steer the conversation to where they wished. This led to unexpected data, only some of which I have been able to analyze here—photographs of a picnic in the village or typical regional rural foodstuffs that would prompt a politics of nostalgic via the most modest objects of rural life; small shrines of sorts or photo albums devoted to disappeared, dead, or imprisoned family members; remarks on the physical structure of homes in the city versus the country; children's drawings of Kurdish nationalist symbols; stories about 'door psychology'.[12] In addition

[12] One home visit involved sitting in a living room and listening to an older man narrate a long story of special forces showing up and banging on his apartment door before taking him away for detention and torture. He was describing being thrown blindfolded into the back of a car, brought to the countryside, and, with a gun to his temple, told that the sound he heard was the digging of his grave, and as he told his story, his adult daughter was repeating in a low voice, "oh that door psychology, that door psychology". Incredibly, at that very moment came a loud banging on the door. The daughter ran to her room. My research collaborator, who had arranged the interview and was there with me, grabbed our notebooks and threw them under the couch. It turned out to be a neighbor complaining about something the man's son

to interviews with newcomers, I also interviewed a smaller number of established Diyarbakırites, mostly small shopkeepers and traders. While the chapter on small shopkeepers did not make the final cut, these interviews helped me to better discern which forms of discourse about the economy were particular to the displaced, and which were part of a broader, popular economic common sense.

Alongside and at least as important as these interviews, however, are two years of accumulated unstructured encounters. The anthropological truism that interviews are secondary to ethnographic research certainly rang true for me by the end of this project. These countless everyday exchanges involved watching people going about their working days. For instance, nearly every week, and for the better part of my fieldwork stay, I spent hours sitting in half a dozen small shops or street stands run by displaced and dispossessed ex-rural producers, who were kind enough to let me watch them go about their working day, settling running tabs with neighborhood customers, chatting about fair prices, inflation, credit card interest rates or loans gone awry, negotiating relations with the municipal commercial police (*zabita*), and so on. In time, a few of these shopkeepers or self-employed vendors grew into research collaborators, recommending questions for my interviews, introducing me to potential interviewees, and explaining to me some of the more opaque aspects of their working lives.

I also spent time in the offices of a number of civil society organizations (*sivil toplum kuruluşları* or *örgütleri*) concerned with researching and addressing questions of forced migration and urban poverty. I visited two organizations semi-regularly for the

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had done while playing in the building. The fear that a loud knock can inspire is a clear remnant of the frequent police house raids across the past few decades, and, as anthropologist Ömer Özcan once put it to me, the politics of the porosity of front doors in southeastern Turkey.

better part of the duration of my fieldwork. Although the results of this phase of fieldwork, when it came to writing up, ended up largely on the cutting room floor, the experience of translating reports, sitting in offices and overhearing terminological debates that illustrated Volosinov's sense of the ideological valence of linguistic signs (poverty or impoverishment? migration or forced displacement?), looking over the shoulder of employees as they interviewed aid applicants, and visiting soup kitchens—these helped to enrich my sense of the existing institutionalized forms of "poverty knowledge" (O'Connor 2001), and of some of the presuppositions, practices, and limits of organized action aimed at addressing the economic consequences of forced migration and dispossession—as well as the possibilities. I also collected and read governmental and non-governmental reports, newspaper articles, and official documents on a range of subjects broadly related to forced displacement and its economic and social consequences, regional and Diyarbakır-specific economic dynamics, and national visions of economic development. Finally, Diyarbakır being the site of regular conferences bringing academics and policy makers together on a range of subjects—regional economic development, cultural and linguistic diversity and linguistic rights, media representations of the southeast, entrepreneurship and banking, forced migration, the formation of the Mesopotamian Social Forum, and a trade fair focused on boosting commercial relations with nearby northern Iraq— I attended as many of these conferences as I could.

## CHAPTERS

The first chapter, "Displacement as Dispossession," provides an overview of existing studies and reports—most of them surveys published in Turkish, largely of a

quantitative bent—on the socioeconomic consequences of forced migration in Diyarbakır. Prefacing that overview is a section that returns to the political-economic sketch of the city initiated above and pushes it further, exploring in more depth the categories of wealth and work in the country and the city that constituted the backdrop for the transformation of livelihoods in the early 1990s. At an empirical level, this chapter is meant to illustrate the specific, practical means by which, as the title suggests, forced migration and forced urbanization also involved dispossession and impoverishment, and to provide the reader with a more general sense of the nature and scope of dispossessed livelihoods. I also begin to weave into this material this dissertation's overarching theoretical interest in the politics of dissensus, which I do by suggesting, in the place of Agamben's notion of bare life (1998), the cultural historian of labor Michael Denning's concept of wageless life, and by relating this term to the overarching theoretical framework of stance and litigious speech.

Chapter two, "Dispossession's Ethnography", is thematically closely linked to the first. It aims to complement the quantitative surveys with selections from fieldwork, namely, oral accounts of forced migration and transformed livelihoods; in it, individuals and families (all of whom were adults or young adults in the 1990s) recount the means by which their ties to the countryside were severed and by which they have attempted to reconstruct life and livelihood in the city. It is here that we begin to work through grounded discourses on livelihood, and to tie them more closely to concepts of stance and dissensus. Comparing the first and second chapters also provides an occasion to consider some of the differences in written and oral accounts of events.

The third chapter, "Tomatoes This Big: Rural Idyll After Dispossession", sustains

the previous chapter's ethnographic focus on older migrants and the forms of loss of livelihood and ways of life that they experienced. Here, I focus on the ways in which indexical signs of food and land are used by forced migrants not only to present an idealized, nostalgic construction of life in the countryside, but to evaluate and to condemn displacement and dispossession and their urban consequences as deeply immoral acts. I try to understand how common rural objects and images are commandeered into a rhetorical politics of displacement and dispossession, in an effort to give more ethnographic depth to the overarching claim of this work that talk about livelihoods and economic life is involved in the practical staking out of political stance.

Chapters four and five share an ethnographic subject. Whereas chapters two and three are based on fieldwork with relatively older forced migrants, these chapters shift to the 'sons of migration'—that is, children who grew up, as one report on the aftermath of forced migration notes, "listening to stories of the village and of migration from their elders" and living "suspended between the neighborhood schools they attended, their struggles on the streets of Diyarbakır to see to their family's livelihoods, and the cotton fields and hazelnut groves where they went with their families to work" (Kalkınma Merkezi 2006:3). I follow the concern with discourses of livelihoods and the practical genesis of political stance by exploring the daily lives and acts of evaluation of a number of young men who came of working age in Diyarbakır, but focus specifically on a phrase a number of my interlocutors used, which was 'working futures'—a term that encompasses both practical trajectories (establishing a viable livelihood, a working future) and the practices of meaning whereby they imagine and envision the forms of working life that lie ahead of them. These chapters also sustain an implicit theoretical

thread running through this study: temporality. If the previous chapters' subjects were generally retrospective in their everyday temporal-imaginative orientation, these chapters' subjects tended to be forward-looking and preoccupied with the future. Focusing ethnographically on the efforts of a few young men to establish a viable working life in a city marked by high rates of joblessness and deep structural problems in its educational system, I explore the ways in which they conceptualize and narrate, through their future-oriented work worries, basic questions of political and economic justice and belonging.

The hope is that in working through the details of these chapters—encounters, interviews, images—the reader will have a better sense of how the widespread public interrogation of the state of affairs of contemporary economic life in Diyarbakır (the legitimacy of the displaced's uprooting in the first place, the justice of the working conditions they are subsequently compelled to enter into, and the debts and obligations of the state, fiscal or otherwise, to its citizens in the wake of injuries to livelihoods) might be seen to constitute an important mode of political stance-taking at this historical conjuncture. I will return to this argument more explicitly in the conclusion. Meanwhile, we turn to the details of the politics of displacement and dispossession.

# CHAPTER 1
## DISPLACEMENT AS DISPOSSESSION

The main aim of this and the subsequent chapter is to provide context for understanding Diyarbakır's radical transformation by displacement and dispossession in the early 1990s. While in the next chapter I pursue this aim by focusing on narratives of the displaced, here I draw on a number of published reports dedicated to recording the social and economic consequences of forced migration in Diyarbakır.

Read together, these reports provide a documentary overview of forced migration's means and aftermath. But documentation is not the sole aim of the chapter. I also raise here a number of theoretical questions having to do with the concept of bare life, as developed in the work of Giorgio Agamben (1998). The picture that emerges across this chapter is one of a deliberate state counterinsurgency project resulting, whether intentionally or not, in widespread forms of urban impoverishment and (at first literal, later more figurative) homelessness, followed by years of the state turning a blind eye to these results. In light of its practical consequences, does it not make sense to think of forced migration—envisioned by policy-makers as a means of first eliminating the PKK's rural support network and then concentrating people into ostensibly more easily policed population centers (see Jongerden 2007:43-91)—as an instance of subjecting ex-rural Kurds to a condition of barely living?

Agamben's well-known concept of bare life argues that modern forms of power unite what Foucault (1978, 2010) had suggested were distinct: sovereignty, or the right to decide who lives and dies, with biopolitics, or "power as the administration of life".[13]

[13] The last phrase is from an interview with Jacques Ranciere (2010) on his critical approach to the analytic utility of biopolitics.

This approach provides a critical framework for analyzing instances in which states exercise the sovereign power to decide when to withhold legal norms and produce entire populations kept barely alive—not marginalized, Agamben notes (as marginalization suggests something beyond or outside), but included within the space of state power precisely so as to be excluded from or stripped of political life and legal recourse, or what Agamben refers to, throughout his work, as "inclusive exclusion". Thinking through this framework, is it then fair to say that the violence the state committed in real physical terms is now perpetuated through turning, for the most part, a blind eye to the span and severity of existing poverty, while once in a while blinking and imposing the rule of law? In other words, are we seeing here the war against Kurdish political dissensus being carried out by other (namely, economic) terms, reducing people's lives to the struggle to stay barely alive? Might this explain why people keep talking about their loss and lack of livelihood in thinly veiled political terms?

Holding in abeyance a lengthier explication, the short answer is, no—or at least, not quite. It seems important to keep in mind an image at the heart of Agamben's work: the camp. Part of Agamben's project is a response to a Habermasian notion of politics as deliberation in the public sphere, with Agamben essentially noting that people in refugee or concentration camps are quite literally precluded from even entering that sphere; they cannot, as it were, even come to the table. Yet in Diyarbakır, we find a rather different situation. Whereas it is true that in some cases, as with the first man we shall meet in chapter two, that the forms of physical and temporal exhaustion brought about by dispossession and urban inclusive exclusion might be said to have worn lives down to a condition of barely living, in the majority of my fieldwork encounters, it was deep and

vibrant political critique, even in the face of—or perhaps precisely because of—these conditions that marked the political lives of my interlocutors. This is not a case of the stripping of all that makes us political, a reduction of human life to its barest biological conditions. We begin, then, to see the limits of applying the concept of bare life too broadly (Comaroff 2007).

I will return to this point below, where, across this and the following chapters, I trace these questions across different ethnographic contexts in order to explore the potential analytical yields and limits of this way of thinking about politics in the aftermath of displacement and dispossession. First, however, we need a more general background or context for understanding the mass transformation of lives and livelihoods in the 1990s. This background comes in two sections. The first is an expansion of the brief historical and political-economic sketch of the city provided in the introduction. The second is an overview of the available documentary evidence about displacement and dispossession in the 1990s. After these sections, I return to the question of bare life and its conceptual limits, by way of transition to the next chapter.

## "VILLAGERS WITHOUT VILLAGES, VILLAGES WITHOUT VILLAGERS"[14]

In order to appreciate something of the processes of the loss and lack of livelihoods, it helps to have a sense of the general features of village economies in the environs of Diyarbakır. Prior to forced migration, what were the main forms of work, property, and wealth?

[14] The phrase is from an interview with a Suriçi shopkeeper with a penchant for summing up his explanations of Diyarbakır's contemporary socio-economic and political life through phrases that often brought to mind yellow journalism headlines. Another favorite line of his was, "Three things are important in Diyarbakır today: economy, economy, and economy".

Southeastern Turkey's rural economy depends almost entirely on farming and animal pastoralism. Irrigation is not widespread in the countryside, such that most farmers rely on rainfall or, if they happen to live close to a stream or a river, natural irrigation. Significant land inequalities are another important feature of rural livelihoods in the southeast, with powerful landlords or aghas, typically connected to tribes with historical links to the state—a pattern preceding Turkish rule, and rooted in Ottoman policies of local liaising (see Bruinessen 1988)—holding large plots and, before the mechanization of agriculture in the last half century, holding landless peasants in essentially serf-like work relationships. A news piece in *Le Monde* from the late 1970s describes one such arrangement between landless tenant laborers and a large landowner, who

> would visit occasionally to reaffirm his authority and assign work. This consisted mainly of labor on the cotton plantation of the Mesopotamian plain two hundred metres below. All except the very old or very young would descend to the plain daily, to work an eleven-hour day. For this the rates of pay were $1 for a child, $1.50, and $2 for a man. Villagers reckoned they had a 30 percent mortality rate among the children. [McDowall 1996:419]

Land reforms have occasionally been the subject of political debate in Turkey, but these have tended to favor the interests of landowners, as in Turkey's 1926 implementation of the Swiss Civil Code, which codified landowners' claims (Aydın 1986:32) or in subsequent reforms. Aydın notes, in his monograph on two villages just outside of Diyarbakır, "land reform has been a protracted story of the Turkish Republic from its inception. The existence of a strong landlord class in Turkey and their effective role in Turkish politics has not allowed the implementation of any extensive land reform programme" (1986:62; Aktan 1971). Rates of inequality in landownership in the southeast have been historically quite high. Aydın's own fieldwork found that 25 percent

of the people included in his two-village sample were landless, while the vast majority of families farmed plots to sustain a household, contrasted with a small number of landlords owning vast plots that made them quite wealthy (1986:117).

Generally speaking, landholding patterns can be mapped onto the two main geographies of rural settlement in the southeast: mountains and plains. Mountainous settlements—villages, but more often hamlets; settlement in rural southeastern Turkey is quite dispersed (Jongerden 2007)—tend to have smaller plots and rely on a mixture of practices: small-scale market production in a few commodity crops such as wheat or (until recently) tobacco, subsistence farming of vegetables and fruits, and animals (with sheep and goats more common than cows). Plains tend to feature far larger plots and more frequency of large landholdings devoted to large-scale commodity crop production, particularly in cereals (Bruinessen 1988:15-20). On the matter of the degree of formality of property patterns, plains landowners, historically well connected to the state (and with significant interests, of course, in securing their assets), usually hold formal property documents. Mountain farmers usually do not. Furthermore, it is conventional for fathers to subdivide their land among their sons, an act of bequeathing that often goes unregistered—which, incidentally, is one of a number of aspects complicating the legal processes of compensation for war-related losses (see elsewhere in this study for more details about the so-called Compensation Law No. 5233).

Although the subject of merchants or traders in the countryside is, to my knowledge, minimally covered in the limited micrological literature, in both Turkish and English, on rural southeastern Turkey, what evidence I am aware of makes it clear that, by and large, farming is, and has been, the widest category of work across rural

southeastern Turkey. That said, in addition to the categories of work listed above—rural landlords, agricultural small holders, and landless tenant farmers—large landowners sometimes invest their yields in other ventures: lending money on interest to landless or land-poor farmers, purchasing a transit vehicle to ferry villagers back and forth to nearby towns or cities, or opening a small store. Some villages thus come to contain certain aspects of town economies, if on a smaller scale.

Because of the geography of the PKK's guerrilla tactics, which favored the terrain of the mountains as conduit and shelter, forced migration policies touched down most acutely in those spaces. And because most mountainous areas tend to feature more dispersed, small hamlets than villages or towns, forced migrants consequently overwhelmingly hail from rural economies of small-scale farming and shepherding.

Hamlets nevertheless have their own internal differentiations. Those with land closer to a water source could naturally farm more. Two older men whose house I visited on the outskirts of Diyarbakır, recalling their life of farming on a mountainous plot between two streams in a hamlet outside of the town of Kulp, frequently referred to themselves throughout our exchange as rich.[15] Another middle-aged man I interviewed boasted of his large landholding and his status in the hamlet, noting that he was able to afford rare clothing and build his own stables (subsequently burned by the military) to enlarge his cattle holding.

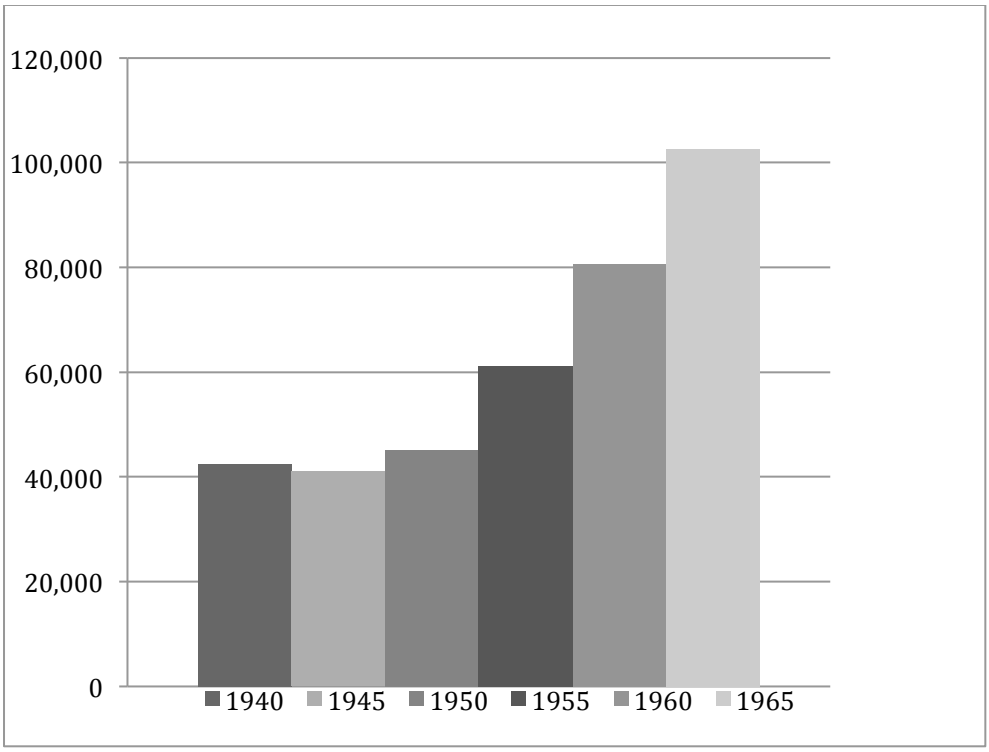
Such distinctions aside, though, trade or other, non-agricultural categories of work were located mostly in villages and towns, not hamlets. Many of the older forced

[15] Contrasting those days to their present conditions, which the older of the brothers summarized by calling our attention to the tarp he used to patch the holes in his roof, both men wept and cursed the state for inflicting what they insisted was unjust injury.

migrants I met hinted at this fact when they described coming to towns or cities only rarely, in transit vehicles, to stock up on essentials such as flour and cooking oil. Another indication of the absence of merchants and traders in mountainous geographies is found in the strategies employed by the PKK in the 1990s to feed its troops. The fact that "there were no shops in these small settlements [meant that] it was impossible just to show up and order from—or raid—the local market", notes Aliza Marcus (1970: 184-5), which compelled PKK tacticians to devise elaborate cross-country networks for trucking food into the countryside. My sense, drawn from the encounters and interviews informing this work, is that what differentiation might have existed across farmers in a hamlet or village—the difference in landholding between a small and a medium farmer—had limited bearing on their subsequent economic trajectories.

This general picture of "traditional" rural economic practices and arrangements in the southeast may, however, suggest more stability in the countryside than actually existed. As we noted in the last chapter, the twentieth century history of country and city in the southeast was one of a string of radical political and economic transformations. One factor has been the normalization of migrant labor relations and rural-urban migration since World War II. These demographic and economic forces were spurred on here, as elsewhere in Turkey, by the mechanization of agriculture, which rendered the labor of countless thousands of landless tenant farmers redundant. Thus in Diyarbakır, in 1950, the city's population, by official counts, was just over 40,000, but over the next decade and a half, it grew by approximately 20,000 people every five years. The post-World War II period was one of steady urbanization as a clear result of rural dispossession by agro-technological change.

Table 1: Diyarbakır Population, 1945-1960, created by the author based on TÜIK data.




Many newcomers sought work in the city's existing markets, as Diyarbakır was then, as it is now, a small-scale commercial center for its surrounding provinces, by virtue of its size, location, and transportation links. I met a number of small shopkeepers and merchants in carrying out this research whose families had come to the city at this time.

We have already seen, with Keyder (1987), that the social upheavals tied to rural-urban migration, coupled with the perceived geographical inequities in the distribution of development capital, led, across the 1960 and 1970s, to a wider perception of economic inequality across Turkey. We also noted the emergence, out of a process of infighting among Kurdish nationalist groups at the time (Marcus 2007: 40-42), of the separatist Workers Party of Kurdistan, the PKK, which grew in part out of this period of the widespread politicizing of economic inequity.

A detailed examination of the PKK's formation and trajectory is beyond the aims of this study. A thumbnail sketch of their emergence and subsequent acts and aims, however, is critical to this chapter, as it helps us to understand the specific context behind rural forced migration and dispossession. After its formal inception in a village outside of Diyarbakır in 1978, by the late 1980s the PKK had achieved a degree of power and popular support that few observers had foreseen (Marcus 2007: 89-130). In line with the PKK's tactical emphasis on what Joost Jongerden termed "poly-centricity…and multi-directionality" (2007: 50)—small groups of guerrillas favored mobility and geographical unpredictability; there was no central unit but many semi-independent organs, and no single, stable base or front line—the rural-based insurgency moved across the southeast's rugged mountain geographies and worked to build a network of peasant support so as to move, in Mao's well-known phrase, like fish in water (2009:41). This and similar tactics helped the 'people's army' to transform its disadvantages into advantages, and to do the converse for Turkish armed forces.

By the early 1990s, however, the Turkish army began to change its strategies and to incorporate more recent strategies of military counterinsurgency techniques. In its revised approach to eliminating a political movement that it framed as 'terrorist'[16] and a threat to national integrity, the military sought to root out the networks of rural support that in part allowed the PKK its tactical advantage, and to spatially concentrate populations in cities—what Jongerden refers to as a technique of "spatial deprivation":

> [The PKK's] dependence on [rural] space is also a guerilla's weak point, and spatial deprivation the Achilles heel. The 'field domination doctrine' announced by the General Staff in 1991 and systematically implemented from 1993 onwards

[16] For a wry satire of the application of the term terrorism in contemporary Turkish politics, see Buğlalılar (2011).

> changed the situation dramatically. The objective of the new doctrine was the destruction of the PKK environment, both by contraction (resettlement of the population) and penetration (deployment of special forces, applying the principles of a war of movement, and penetrating the spaces of the PKK, as well as drafting the civilian populations in PKK areas into the village guard system). At a tactical level, the resettlement and drafting policies both denied the guerrilla food, shelter, intelligence and recruits, and created kill-zones in the countryside. At a strategic level, the army engineered a new settlement pattern by accelerating rural to-urban migration (under duress, by threat and intimidation and by burning houses and destroying villages), thereby forcing the guerrilla to choose between retreat or engagement in a confrontation with the state in urban entities (a tough environment for insurgents, but favorable for the state). [Jongerden 2007:91]

This dense quote refers to a number of means of displacement and dispossession, and in order to better understand how they impacted the history of the destabilization of rural lives and livelihoods around Diyarbakır, we should pause briefly to consider each.

As we noted earlier, food supplies were a constant tactical challenge for guerrillas. Thus part of the military's strategy involved setting quotas on households, limiting the quantities of basic foodstuffs they could buy and store. Being found with what was deemed too much food could, as some of my interlocutors recalled, raise the suspicions of the armed forces that one was providing support to the guerrillas, and result in being blacklisted and subjected to frequent and unpleasant house searches by state armed forces.

Alongside food rationing were restrictions on rural mobility. The aim of restricting rural mobility was to prevent contact between villagers and guerrillas. What this often entailed in practice, however, was a restriction on animal husbandry, as shepherds relied on access to common mountain pastures (*mera*) to graze their flocks. Many of my interlocutors had memories of getting into heated discussions with soldiers who insisted that these restrictions were for the safety of the villagers; some, as we shall see in the following chapters, recalled firefights in so-called kill zones that took the lives

of women and men taking sheep or cows to pasture or women collecting firewood. These restrictions were the first in a series of devastating blows to animal husbandry, an important component in regional rural livelihoods. A curious bind: the price of violating these bans could be fatal, but the price of heeding the ban, while certainly less harsh, could be devastating for rural household economies dependent on animal husbandry.

Because the processes of destroying and evacuating villages were so devastating, one can take no pleasure from the irony that the guerrilla praxis of blending with civilians in the name of their liberation led to countless peasant household catastrophes, after the military took a similar tack—that is, blurring the distinction between combatant and civilian in the counterinsurgency methods it adopted. One such method was the attempt to forge a paramilitary force, the so-called village guard system—colloquially, *korucu*—out of rural Kurdish society. While playing, in some cases, on existing social divisions along tribal lines, the system was also spread by threat. Villages were given the option of either accepting collaboration with the military, as armed units that agreed to inform on and resist with arms any PKK presence in their locality, or facing military forced evacuation and the destruction of homes and means of livelihood. It is difficult to speak generally about what induced people to participate in the village guard system. In many instances, the military recruited tribes with historical allegiances, or smuggler tribes who knew the mountains and borders well (Bruinessen 2002). Payments may have enticed desperately poor rural households, along with the guarantee of not being displaced. In the passage below, the Kurdish journalist and political activist Musa Anter, slain in Diyarbakır in 1992 under suspicious circumstances, recounts an encounter with a village guard whose trajectory suggests the latter incentive. Prefacing the story is a short

anecdote. Anter was in a teahouse where a few young men were playing cards, and one accused another of cheating. The accused countered not by the formulaic phrase *kurban olayım* (a phrase quite specific to the southeast, and meaning 'please', or 'for God's sake', or literally, 'may I be a sacrificial victim'), but with a fascinating variation: *korucu olayım*. Anter goes on to say:

> Ninety percent [?] do this ugly work out of poverty. A few days ago, someone said to me, crying, "Uncle, of course we know that this work is dirty. But what are you going to do? Seven children are looking to my hand [depend on me]. I have neither skills nor credit, neither capital nor goods nor property. In the past I was engaged in smuggling [across the Turkish-Syrian border near Nusaybin], passing among the mines. For the subsistence of my children, I was, at every moment, nose to nose with death. But still you couldn't call what I did dishonorable, and still everyone had mercy on us and showed us respect. But now this cursed village guard work removed us from humanity…Believe me, [if you die as a *korucu*] in the whole village you can't find a single man to dig your grave. Even your closest relatives won't come to pay condolences…Believe me, uncle Musa, when I take that dirty payment it's like putting a blind snake in my pocket. I know it's not right, but what can I do, my wife and kids are hungry. The other day I said, get up, damn it, and shoot them all, then shoot yourself, and be saved from this disgrace, but I couldn't bear to do it to the children. At first we thought this work was like being a watchman. All right, no harm in that, we said. There have always been watchmen [a historical state-created position in such border spaces] and no one resented them. But it seems ours is another kind of watchman's work. Truly, we're disgraced. May Allah save us. [Anter 1996: 95]

The village guard system played a small part in chipping away at the PKK's rural support. But the paramilitarization of the countryside was apparently not enough. An older man who watched his large holding of nut trees and vineyards burn, along with his house, in the emptying of many villages outside of the mountainous provincial town of Lice explained to me his take on the evolution of counterinsurgency strategies: "Well, so what happened? So the government officials said, let's try village guards. But they looked and saw it wasn't working. So they said, let's dry up the PKK's tap…let's empty the villages, because the ones in the mountains [*dağdakiler,* a common epithet for the PKK] go and get their food and drink from nearby villages." Peaking between roughly

1991 and 1994, the military undertook a deliberate strategy of evacuating and destroying thousands of rural settlements suspected of or proven to have some combination of the following characteristics: to be along PKK mountain routes, to be providing material support, intelligence, shelter, or recruits to the PKK, or to have resisted military pressure to become village guards. Alongside the destruction of homes was a practice that Dutch researchers who brought together sociohistorical analysis and satellite imagery data of burnt or destroyed forests and settlements have described as environmental destruction as a counterinsurgency strategy (Jongerden et al. 2008). Burned forests, burned fruit and nut tree groves and vineyards, destroyed stables, and trampled fields and gardens: when added to limited access to mountain pastures, dwindling returns and increased rural asset loss and indebtedness, as local markets suffered the many effects of conflict, and of course the most blatant event, the forced evacuation of large swaths of the countryside: all added up to the most significant demographic change to upper Mesopotamia since World War I.

Thousands of rural settlements now stand empty or in ruins in the countryside: "villages without villagers". Many of my interlocutors described the uncanny experience of returning, years after forced migration, to the village in which they grew up and formed memories connected to daily activities, only to find, as one middle-aged man put it to me, a landscape "flat, as if the middle of nowhere, as if no one had lived there for a thousand years". Meanwhile, the displaced were almost entirely left to their own devices, to go wherever practical details of family ties, money, or simple proximity allowed. In part, this dispersed Kurds across Turkey. Istanbul, as commentators in the media and in academic writing frequently point out, is now the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, due in

part to the effects of forced migration in the 1990s.[17] Around the same time, Kurdish migrant neighborhoods also sprang up in İzmir, Ankara, Bursa, Adana, and Mersin.

Many of the displaced also remained in the southeast, and set about their efforts to rebuild life and livelihood in cities like Diyarbakır, Batman, Van, and Hakkâri. While all these cities were radically transformed, many analysts (e.g. TMMOB 1998) have identified Diyarbakır as something of a capital of displacement in the southeast.

As anyone familiar with the difficulties of reaching trustworthy statistics for situations of political conflict might guess, even the most basic figures regarding the period are deeply contested. While the total number of rural settlements evacuated is more or less agreed to be around 3,000, estimates of the total number of rural residents uprooted vary greatly. A chart included in a recent report by a pro-Kurdish forced migrants rights NGO[18] nicely summarizes the murk:

[17] For a passing mention of this common remark, see Kerem Öktem (2009) on unsanctioned forms of difference in Istanbul.

[18] See also IDMC 2009 for a helpful summary of the available figures.

Table 2: adapted by the author from Diyarbakır GÖÇ-DER (2009)

| INSTITUTION | ESTIMATE |
|---|---|
| Investigative Commission of Turkish Parliament (1997) | 378,335 |
| US Committee for Refugees | 400,000 – 1,000,000 |
| Human Rights Watch | 2,000,000 |
| GÖÇ-DER | 3,500,000-4,000,000 |
| Human Rights Foundation of Turkey | 3,000,000 |
| Union of Chamber of Turkish Architects and Engineers | 3,000,000 |
| Office of the US Presidency | At most 1,000,000 |
| UNHCR | 2,000,000 |
| Joint statement by group of NGOs & parties in Turkey (İHD, TİHV, TMMOB, GÖÇ-DER, ÖDP, HADEP) | More than 3,000,000 |
| UN Helsinki Commission | More than 3,000,000 |
| Minority Human Rights Group International | 3,000,000 |
| Hacettepe University (Ankara) Institute of Population Studies (state-commissioned study) | 950,000-1,200,000 |

From 400,000 to 4 million is a significant discrepancy. Part of this has to do with how one calculates the 'forced' in forced migration. Is a shepherding village that, while not directly evacuated, saw its main source of livelihood dry up due to restricted access to mountain pastures to be counted? Or do we count only those villages that were evacuated by direct military force? What about all those who fled out of fear of violence and rumors of impending conflict or paramilitarization? Ultimately whether one takes the state's most recent estimate of around 1 million or the high-end figure of 4 million, it is clear that great numbers of rural Kurds were uprooted in the 1990s. In the case of Diyarbakır, within a few short, violent years, a city already relatively marginal to the geographies of wealth in Turkey, and suffering atop that from capital flight during the conflict—as well as from a string of economic blows around the same period unrelated to Kurdish dissensus in the southeast (UN sanctions restricting trade with nearby Iraq, Turkey's national fiscal crises around 2001)—suddenly became home to tens of thousands of households rendered abruptly and radically dependent on wages, yet in the absence of sufficient wage labor to be had.

The aim of this section was to expand our sense of the political economy of country and city in the southeast, and to provide a general sketch of forced migration. To better understand the aftermath of forced migration, however, let us turn to a number of reports and studies on the consequences of displacement and dispossession in Diyarbakır.

## SURVEYING THE AFTERMATH

One of the more comprehensive and careful studies of the aftermath of displacement and dispossession in Diyarbakır comes from the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, or TMMOB, a left-leaning civil society organization. Their 1998 *Bölgeiçi Zorunlu Göçten Kaynaklanan Toplumsal Sorunların Diyarbakır Kenti Ölçeğinde Araştırılması* provides a rough estimate of the total number of rural Kurds who came to the city across the peak years of forced migration. Between 1990 and 1996, they estimate that Diyarbakır took in just over 120,000 people and grew by 116 percent (TMMOB 1998: 20-26). Today, with an official population of just under 900,000, this means that the city has grown by roughly 220 percent in approximately two decades. Spatially, too, the city has expanded dramatically in recent years. A majority of Diyarbakır's structures were erected after the 1990s, and today the city continues to extend to the northwest. There are new construction spaces every time I visit the city, and more than a few of the young men I interviewed or met in the process of this research have found temporary work on these construction sites, this being one of the few sectors in the city with job openings, even if they are mostly off-the-books and unpredictable. In short, the rapid spatial growth of the city, consonant with its rapid population growth, has dramatically expanded the borders of the city throughout the past two decades.

The TMMOB report totals up to a rather bleak picture of the city's economy as it stood in the late 1990s. Those few industries that did not flee the violent environment were working well under capacity. Local agriculture and animal husbandry were greatly under-producing, city unemployment rates were at a staggering 70 percent, and 58 percent of those working relied on day labor or other forms of work in the city's thriving off-the-books economy (TMMOB 1998: 132-134, 143-144). With a per capita average monthly income of 283 dollars, 87 percent of the city was living under the poverty level. Nearly 90 percent of forced migrants were found to identify unemployment as the most important challenge facing the city. The report is full of such grim prediction as this:

> Of those who migrated from rural sites to Diyarbakır, 85.76 percent maintain no ties to the possessions left behind [in the countryside]. The effect of this situation on the urban economy is that, in the coming years, the city will experience more bluntly its deprivation from the countryside, and will be further impoverished. [TMMOB 1998:144]

How have these predictions fared in time?

Approximately a decade later, another report, this one researched and written under the aegis of the UN's Local Agenda 21 and the Diyarbakır-based poverty-relief NGO Sarmaşık, confirmed the trajectory sketched out in the TMMOB report. (Sarmaşık has explicit sympathies with the wider aims of the contemporary political struggle for expanded political, linguistic, and cultural expression for Kurds in Turkey.) Sarmaşık employees described to me their aims in preparing the report as essentially empirical; the organization aimed to create relief or assistance programs for forced migrants, and felt a need to have solid quantitative data about the socioeconomic situation of the city's displaced newcomers. There is also an undeniable political element to the report. It documents the nature and extent of state injuries against rural Kurdish villagers, and does

not hesitate to blame the state for the current undesirable livelihood conditions of forced migrations dispossessed of a means of livelihood and largely abandoned—or inclusively excluded, in Agamben's framework—to the precarious margins of Diyarbakır's and Turkey's disinherited labor economies. In the report, Sarmaşık confirmed many of TMMOB's fears.[19] Through surveys and interviews carried out in 5,700 displaced households spread across five neighborhoods, researchers found a minority of households getting by on regular wage labor (around 20 percent). Another 20 percent identified as unemployed, while an additional 40 percent reported relying solely on temporary, seasonal, or day labor to get by. Eighty percent of displaced households surveyed, in other words, live in a situation of livelihood precariousness.

The report states often and unequivocally that contemporary urban poverty is the outcome of forced migration and its dispossessing effects. It further notes that of those surveyed who had left their villages (and not all were forced migrants from the 1990s; a small percentage of those included in the survey universe had come a generation or more ago), a little over 50 percent cited conflict as the primary cause, while another 23 percent cited economic factors. Yet this latter figure, the report authors suggest, should not be interpreted in the conventional sense of economic migration (people leaving the country for the city for reasons of job opportunities): "more than coming to the city for its economic draw or opportunities for employment, people were fleeing a rural economy severely impaired by practices widely implemented during [OHAL, the period of martial

[19] Having spent some time with Sarmaşık members (they were kind enough to let me visit their office frequently, a favor I tried to repay by translating documents into English for them), it is my sense that the report was carefully designed and methodologically quite sound. One can always question the generalizability of its findings, but this only underscores the obvious point that statistics should be handled with care. Given the problem of sound statistics in this context (or anywhere, for that matter), my approach here has been to draw from multiple reports, in the hope that across their differences a general sense of the period in question may emergence.

law in effect across the southeast for most of the 1990s], including bans on the use of pastures and stables, a food embargo, and the curtailing of travel and mobility" (Sarmaşık 2009: 23). The survey also contains a quantitative illustration of a matter at the heart of this and the following chapter: the means by which forced displacement also entailed dispossession. The households in question reported the following losses: loss of agricultural products, 24 percent; loss of home, 35 percent; loss of fields, 24 percent; loss of home furniture, 27 percent; loss of animals, 22 percent; loss of work, 21 percent; loss of life, 8 percent. While over 90 percent of households included in the survey reported making a living before migration from agriculture and animal husbandry, after the 1990s "most found themselves, in the urban economy, reclassified as temporary or 'unskilled' laborers…[and] with the instability that accompanies displacement, most of the displaced were excluded from urban labor markets" (Sarmaşık 2009: 24). Further compounding this process were broader economic changes alluded to earlier:

> The atmosphere of conflict over the last twenty years has caused public and private sector investments to come to a halt, and brought about a serious contraction in employment and economic development. Investors are aware of the region's clear potential, yet remain unwilling and hesitant due to regional political instability. Opportunities in Diyarbakır for employment, which were already insufficient, fell even farther below necessary levels with the rapid increase in the city's population. This consequently boosted both unemployment and the informal sector. [Sarmaşık 2009: 4]

The report goes on to state that by the World Food Organization's standards of poverty, based on household incomes, in Diyarbakır over 80 percent of the households surveyed lived below the poverty line. When further asked to compare economic conditions before and after migration, about a quarter responded "worse"; 40 percent responded "much

worse". The overall picture emerges, then, of not so much poverty but impoverishment[20], not a static condition but a process, a condition created by human hands, whereby hundreds of thousands of people who, although many were landless and, by most standards, poor in the countryside—between 30 and 40 percent of the rural population of southeastern Turkey is estimated to be landless (TMMOB Diyarbakır İl Koordinasyon Kurulu 2009)—became unquestionably worse-off through dispossession and forced urbanization, and by the forms of wage dependency in the absence of sufficient wage labor that this brought.

Let me pause our exploration of these reports to explain a phrase in the last sentence, as it is an important part of this empirical context of dispossession, which would seem (at this historical point, at least, and in this city) to differ from the familiar Marxist picture of dispossession as the production of a class of "free" laborers to be exploited by capitalist industry. The cultural historian of labor Michael Denning, in a recent theoretical piece on the concept of what he terms "wageless life", calls for a conceptual decoupling on the following point: "We must insist that 'proletarian' is not a synonym for 'wage labourer' but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don't need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labour, is the starting point in understanding the free market" (2010: 81). Wageless life is Denning's attempt to theorize a condition that shares certain broad features—yet through

[20] Terminology is important for organizations like Sarmaşık. As I noted in a brief piece written in the middle of fieldwork (Day 2008), many local governmental and non-governmental organizations are emphatic in describing the present urban economic life of Diyarbakır not through the abstract noun *yoksulluk* (*yoksul* means poor, and is rooted in the negative existential participle *yok* plus *–luk*, an abstract-noun forming ending similar to the English –ness) but through the verbal noun, *yoksullaştırma* (*yoksul* plus the somewhat clunky but effective modern Turkish ending *-laştırma*, which, broken down, is, loosely, *yoksullaş* (to become poor), *yoksullaştır* (to cause to become poor), *yoksullaştırma* (the condition of causing to become poor). The difference in these terms corresponds to the English difference between poverty and impoverishment. Questions of causality and process versus abstraction and stasis suffuse debates in contemporary southeastern Turkey on the aftermath of displacement.

a distinctly political-economy framework—with Agamben's notion of bare life. However, there are important differences, to which I will turn in the conclusion of this chapter. Here, it is sufficient to note that when I refer to the condition of wage dependency in describing the results of dispossession, this does not necessarily mean that the people in question are actually taking in regular or adequate wages.

Returning to the reports, a similar picture to Sarmaşık's emerges from other existing studies. A neighborhood survey commissioned by the city government as it was rethinking so-called urban renewal[21] strategies in Diyarbakır's old walled city center, and carried out by a national (that is, not locally based, as are the other studies profiled here) research company, focused on 462 households in the old city center, which with its many abandoned houses and low-cost rents, took in a large proportion of the displaced in the early 1990s. The survey found that 24 percent of 'heads of household'—typically older males taken, by most such household surveys, as the basis for the generation of household statistics—reported being unemployed. An additional 25 percent worked as temporary uninsured workers (porters, shoe-shiners, seasonal or day laborers in agriculture and construction, house cleaners, etc.), while another 10 percent worked as street vendors or hawkers and eight percent more as unregistered shopkeepers. In other words, totaling these figures, we see that nearly two thirds of households surveyed make a living in off-the-books sectors.

[21] There is reason to recall James Baldwin's famous quip, voiced in reference to so-called urban renewal schemes in the 1960s and 1970s in American cities: urban renewal means negro removal. The same general process he meant to call attention to—urban renewal schemes overwhelmingly targeting the powerless—is regrettably at work in Diyarbakır's ongoing processes of renewal—a subject urgently in need of ethnographic treatment—which are again displacing thousands of already displaced and dispossessed Kurdish urban newcomers.

The report goes on to note that just over half of the surveyed households earned less than 5,000 lira per year, placing them below then national minimum wage levels of 416 lira per month, while one third earned between 6,000 and 10,000 lira, or roughly minimum wage or just above. Roughly 90 percent of those surveyed, that is, were found to be living at or below minimum wage standards. When the sources of household income are further unpacked, under half of household incomes come from temporary labor, while 21 percent derived from public or private forms of aid and assistance. Only 22 percent of household incomes are derived from regular wages. Sixty-seven percent of households were found to qualify for state-sponsored low-income health care assistance (the so-called Green Card system), roughly five times the 2009 national average.

A final report comes from the Diyarbakır-based NGO, the Development Centre (*Kalkınma Merkezi*). Their 2006 report, *Forced Migration and its Effects: Diyarbakır,* found, in a survey of around 400 households spread across five neighborhoods populated mostly by the displaced, that 60 percent of households had monthly incomes under the national minimum wage. About half reported owning land in their villages, but were typically unable to make use of this land since coming to the city. The report also found that more than one in four households surveyed were engaged in off-the-books seasonal farm work. Two in three households further reported a serious decline in living standards since leaving the village.

Meanwhile, as the pervasiveness of poverty in Diyarbakır, and indeed across the southeast, is no secret in Turkey, poverty has attracted the attention of not only researchers but also national and international agents of "development". The scare quotes are meant to indicate not a generalized skepticism towards development, but to

question the extent to which the promises of various development agents are actually changing grounded economic realities of the displaced and dispossessed urban poor in the particular context of Diyarbakır. Let us take as an example a development project that, for many people in Turkey who live outside of the region, is likely to be the first to come to mind if asked about poverty and development in the southeast: the Southeastern Anatolian Project, or GAP by its Turkish acronym. There is a popular perception in Turkey, aided by semi-regular political pronouncements to this effect—such as the announcement in the run-up to the 2009 elections of a multi-billion dollar public investment in GAP (on everyday interpretations of this announcement in Diyarbakır, see the final chapter of this study)— that a great deal of money is being spent on the development of social and economic conditions in the southeast. Indeed, on many occasions, when explaining my research to friends or acquaintances in Ankara or Istanbul and noting that I met many people in Diyarbakır who call for meaningful economic development, the response was often indignant: 'But we're already spending more than we can afford to develop the southeast!'

GAP is at heart a massive, ambitious dam-building project on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, focused on hydroelectricity and irrigation. Since the late 1980s, GAP has further expanded its ambitions to 'social development' (see Özok 2004 for a biopolitical perspective on this shift in GAP's rhetoric and practice), promising, among other things, expanded gender equality and lowered unemployment rates across the southeast. But as Mustafa Sönmez (2012) has pointed out, while nearly 80 percent of GAP's projected hydroelectric facilities have been completed—with much of the electricity channeled out of the region—the socioeconomic effects of the project are few

and far between, leading some to question whether they are not just efforts to soften the image of what is at heart a project with deep economic (energy production) and political (hydropolitical relations with nearby Syria and Iraq) interests at stake (see Nestor 1996, Jongerden 2010). Only a fraction (less than 20 percent) of the projected irrigation infrastructure, which would arguably benefit the regional agricultural economy more than electricity, has been completed. And promises of jobs brought by investment in energy and water infrastructure, such as the 4,000,000 jobs promised in a 2009 announcement, have been called, in a study written by TMMOB's Diyarbakır branch, "entirely deceptive" (TMMOB Diyarbakır İl Koordinasyon Kurulu 2009:16), since most of the work in question—construction work on dam-building projects—would be largely off-the-books, low paying, and temporary.

Another agent often expected, particularly in the now-hegemonic neoliberal language framing discussions of economic development in Turkey today, to play a role in rebuilding regional life and livelihoods is private capital. In contemporary Turkey, the ruling vision of economic developmentalism no longer sees much of a role for state-led developmentalism, preferring instead a vision of the state as facilitating private capital. Yet for reasons noted above (conflict, UN embargoes, infrastructural challenges), private investment has proven difficult to attract at a significant scale.

Other forms of development exist. Diyarbakır was, as noted elsewhere in the study, the pilot city in Turkey for the Grameen Bank's global microcredit program. As of 2010, there were roughly 9,000 recipients in the city. Having spent only a month during my fieldwork following microcredit collectors on their weekly household visits to collect on credit payments and spoken with a small sampling of recipients, it is difficult to make

broad statements about the efficacy of the program. With that caveat, though, the recipients I met spoke without exception of the program as a band-aid, a superficial application to a problem that is larger than microcredit can handle. There are other non-governmental organizations at work in Diyarbakır as well, including a large number of religious NGOs carrying out charity works in poor neighborhoods. It is difficult to see, however, examples of forms of economic development at the scale that might address the needs of forced migrants.

With this overview of the consequences and context of displacement and dispossession in mind, we turn to a brief theoretical consideration that serves as a conclusion to this chapter.

## BEYOND BARE LIFE

The scenario sketched out above lends itself in many ways to the framework that Agamben outlines in his work on bare life. Including displaced Kurds in the city only to exclude or marginalize them as economic actors would seem to be the lesson of the high rates of joblessness and poverty in Diyarbakır, born of displacement and dispossession. Agamben's term has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years, as a cursory scan of virtually any journal in the social sciences or humanities would show, and part of the term's appeal no doubt lies in the minimalism of Agamben's way of conceptualizing. As Jean Comaroff notes, he relies on only a few images and allegories, which she summarizes as "the ban as originary political act, the production of bare life as the threshold from nature to culture, [and] the camp as hidden matrix" (2007:208). Yet the very elements that make his work appealing also point to its limits. How far, Comaroff

asks, does the framework, "when applied literally to circumstances in the world" (2007:209), help one to explore the ways in which abandonment and efforts to deny people the civil and political rights of inclusion are actively mediated and interpreted by people living through them?

An alternative term, one that echoes elements of bare life, but that I believe opens up more analytic space (and is more specifically attuned to the economic concerns of this study) is Denning's concept of wageless life. Wageless life, as we began to explore earlier, is Denning's term to designate people who have, through acts of dispossession and expropriation, been rendered radically dependent on wages, yet who labor in ways that a conventional Marxist focus on wage labor and the factory floor cannot easily account for. These are not free laborers proletarianized into factory workers, but garbage pickers, street vendors, housecleaners, and a range of other largely off-the-books, part-time, and informal laborers—what Jan Breman calls "wage hunters and gatherers" (1994). At issue, then, is a set of circumstances quite different than the familiar Marxist account of a surplus wage army. This is not to say that such an analysis covers all field sites impacted by the 1990s-era displacement. It is possible to detect a functionalism in mass displacement and dispossession: the creation of millions of wage-dependent ex-peasants as a way of providing industry with ready, "free" labor, and to attack the bargaining power of organized labor to boot. There is something to this hypothesis, at least for certain areas; displaced and dispossessed Kurds do work in factories in the industrial outskirts of Istanbul and other cities; the proletarianization of dispossessed Kurds *is* a reality in certain economic geographies. But, at least when considered from the vantage point of livelihoods of people based mostly in Diyarbakır, what the

ethnographic material following this chapter suggests is a perhaps more unsettling implication of displacement and dispossession. The people we shall meet in the following chapters are less part of an organized strategy of capitalist accumulation through dispossession, and more living proof, however disconcerting, of the limits of indifference and political responsibility when ordinary people are treated as expendable objects of 'national security'.

Wageless life is, as a concept, not only more attuned to the specific economic conditions of displacement and dispossession. It also opens a space for more specific attention to the grounded realities of the people in question, particularly to their capacity as political actors. Denning addresses the popularity of Agamben's term, as well as a handful of others that he sees as broadly similar, and even if this grouping of terms overlooks important differences across them, the broader theoretical point is worth considering: "Bare life, wasted life, disposable life, precarious life, superfluous life: these are among the terms used to describe the inhabitants of a planet of slums…[But] to speak repeatedly of bare life and superfluous life can lead us to imagine that there really are disposable people, not simply that they are disposable in the eyes of state and market" (2010:79). Denning instead focuses on a number of examples where people subjected to economic marginalization have acted to make their demands for better work heard, and in so doing, he implies a call for more attention to the forms of political struggle—acts, in Ranciere's conceptual vocabulary, of the irruption of the non-elected into the realm of sensibility— emerging from spaces of displacement and dispossession. The following chapter takes up this point by turning to a number of portraits and interviews of people who directly experienced the history and aftermath of displacement and dispossession,

and thinking through the significance of this material in terms of a politics of dissensus whereby evaluative discourses about getting by and livelihood struggles provide a means for the staking out of oppositional stances.

# CHAPTER 2
# DISPOSSESSION'S ETHNOGRAPHY

## A STORIED REAL

Whereas the previous chapter aimed to provide a history of displacement and an overview of its aftermath from the vantage point of official reports, this chapter asks, what would this history be like when told from the point of view of its subjects?

This in turn raises a broader question. What distinguishes written and oral histories? One answer might distinguish between the credibility and rationality of the former versus the anecdotal and fallibly subjective nature of the latter. However, as oral historians and anthropologists have tirelessly argued, credibility does not fall into such simple categorization. Thus Alessandro Portelli writes, "oral sources are credible but with a different credibility. The importance of oral credibility may not lie in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge" (1998: 68). "There are no 'false' oral sources"(1998: 68); rather, oral accounts, as narratives, offer a window, in Portelli's approach, into the relationship between personal affective histories and the wider institutional and political histories in which the people he met across his research were embedded. A number of anthropologists have followed similar lines of thinking, if informed by different theoretical frameworks. Kathleen Stewart, in her rich rendering of an "other America", Appalachian West Virginia, questioned the usefulness of distinguishing between the anecdotal and some ostensibly more real way of knowing, preferring instead an approach sensitive to an epistemologically more complicated "storied cultural real" (1996:64).

Importantly, though, to pursue such a line of thinking is not the same as relativizing credibility. If the number of dead in this or that conflict does not matter,

quips Trouillot (1995:13), then why write anything if we already have Little Red Riding Hood? Trouillot's work on "power and the production of history" brings to light the "many ways in which the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production" (1995:xix). Trouillot avoids a simplistic inversion (which would see oral accounts, not official records, as containing the truth) and underscores an important point: in approaching narratives of the past, we must ask what is at stake, and for whom.

From that perspective, the line of distinction here is not only between oral and written accounts. It involves what we might think of as a politics of verification. Many of the reports from the previous chapter partake in a politics of verification shared with the oral accounts here, where what is at stake is proving that what is described *really happened.* In these accounts, the important and implicit other voice in the debate are state claims, regnant until quite recently, that underplayed the severity of the events in the southeast across the 1990s, and that continue to underplay the severity of their consequences. In that sense, across their differences, Sarmaşık, GÖÇ-DER, Kalkınma Merkezi and the men and women who share their accounts in this chapter all have a political and moral interest in ensuring that the past events and their aftermath that they relay are perceived as truthful.

Recognizing the shared stakes across oral and written accounts, however, we should not collapse their differences. Critically, in this context, oral and written narratives of displacement and its aftermath have different conventions of persuasion that must be taken into account. To take Sarmaşık's report as an example, their almost sole

reliance on quantitative and statistical methods places them within a recognized set of rhetorical conventions for report writing—for indexing a document as concerned with the truth, rather than partisan advocacy. Along these lines, a writer and researcher for the Sarmaşık report shared with me that such careful statistical detail was a very conscious move on the report planners' part, an effort to have their claims 'taken seriously'. Across my research, I saw a similar rhetoric of verification at work. A friend in Diyarbakır who worked alongside the mayor and who was involved in writing many of his national and international speeches described how, in the run-up to the 2009 elections, one presentation garnered particular praise from national and international audiences: a talk built around a report with page after page of graphs, charts, and statistics documenting the speech's aim, which had to do with documenting a history of steady economic marginalization of the southeast since its incorporation into the Turkish nation-state. Turkish journalists and EU officials evidently praised the attempt to "speak through facts" rather than making "political" claims. However intelligible these last remarks, what the audience correctly identified in the document was its utilization of a rhetorical convention of credibility building in the genre of reports: statistics, quantification, graphs.

In the accounts that follow, however, different rhetorical strategies are at work. One is what we might call narrative strategies or set pieces that any listener expects for a story to be considered 'authentic'. For example, fires are mentioned in many of the stories that follow. Of course, many villages were burned and the narrators may indeed have experienced this themselves. But the issue is whether the inclusion here has to do with whether the story would, somehow, be thought narratively incomplete or faulty without reference to fires—a narrative question and not one necessarily of memory or

historical truth. Another is the frequent peppering of accounts with discourse markers of actuality (*vallahi, yemin ederim).* And similarly, there were often moments in interviews or encounters when people stepped back from their own story and directly addressed the credence of their narrative, saying, in so many words, please believe what I say. My field notes record three incidents, for instance, wherein, in the middle of an interview, my interlocutors interjected, saying that if I were only there in the village with a camera—which would seem to stand in here as the device of objective recording *par excellence*—I would have been able to see that their narratives were true.

This raises questions: might there not be a politics of rhetoric at work here? And what does this rhetorical work reveal of the stakes behind these oral accounts? I do not approach the oral accounts of displacement and its aftermath that follow as transparent, straightforward acts of relaying 'what really happened'—though they may be that. Rather, I am interested in the political-rhetorical function embedded in these accounts. That is, the accounts may at times, in Portelli's terms, depart from strict historical truth, but the important question is, why would speakers do so? This would seem, along with Portelli and Stewart, to be in pursuit of a cultural real wherein what is at stake for Diyarbakır's forced migrants is not only resisting the denial of the events that led to their uprooting and impoverishment, but also—and this gets us back to the theoretical framework laid out earlier in this work, to Ranciere's (2010) politics of dissensus—taking issue with a current state of affairs by way of a moral-political evaluation of state wrongs through discursive acts (Volosinov 1973).

Before proceeding to the ethnographic heart of this chapter, we must consider another theoretical point, one that surfaces in the narratives that follow and across the

following chapters. This is the matter of time or temporality and its relationship to political life after displacement.

## TEMPORALITY

The extent to which the social experience of time is, beyond its physical reality, shaped in important ways by social, cultural, and political circumstances, is a theme well explored by anthropologists, geographers, and in other cognate disciplines (Lovell 1992, May and Thrift 2001, Munn 1992, Rotenberg 1992, Rutz 1992). "A politics of time", notes Rutz, "is concerned with the appropriation of the time of others…and above all, a politics of time is focused on a struggle for control and forms of resistance or acquiescence" (1992:7). Is the attempt to control time a part of—to again invoke Ranciere's distinction—the policing of Kurdish politics? A number of the men and women profiled below describe a process of constant, exhausting, despair-inducing struggle to make a living after dispossession. They describe having to negotiate a world of work defined not by the ideal of steady wage labor (regular income, basic social benefits and workplace rights, a degree of protection and job security), but by an improvised, day-to-day process of combining a number of often-insufficient sources of income. They talk of leaving home in the morning, arriving home at night, and feeling they have struggled all day but with little to show for it, and not a minute to spare. Is this a police act of depoliticization through preoccupation and distress? Is temporality not a part of a police attempt to depoliticize life in southeastern cities?

Certainly a number of my interlocutors felt so. A young man who was sitting quietly by as I interviewed his father about his trajectory to the city as a result of village

evacuations interjected at one point in the interview to give his opinion that the struggle to make ends meet meant the end of effective political mobilization for Kurds. I paraphrased him in my field notes as saying, *when everybody's worried about how to make it until tomorrow, how can they think of the future? How can they think of politics?* This was a sentiment I encountered not infrequently in fieldwork. But how far does this explanation go in characterizing the political present of Diyarbakır (or at least, political life as it was between 2007 and 2009)? Is it the case that leaving people without time is a component of stripping them of political life, of rendering populations barely living? Is radical dependence on wages and the market in the absence of sufficient opportunities to actually earn enough wages equivalent, to adapt Maurizio Lazzarato's analysis of the function of debt, to being "deprived of a future, that is, of time, time as decision-making, choice, and possibility? (2012:8). Are "the future and its possibilities quashed", as Lazzarato claims, when the busy-ness of wagelessness "neutralizes time, time as the creation of new possibilities, that is to say, the raw material of all political, social or esthetic change" (2012:49]?

Such a way of thinking has potentially powerful analytical application, and may explain certain aspects of the links between Diyarbakır's post-displacement economic, political, and imaginative life. But it does not capture the whole reality of temporality in this context. The matter of time in the wake of dispossession must be complicated, I think, by the existence of another valence of sociopolitical time in the wake of displacement and dispossession: time freed up. Let me be careful here, lest this point come off as callous. Dispossession and the production of mass joblessness have led to a situation of forced idleness, waiting around for months for another temporary job, not

having anything to do for long stretches of time. It is possible to see this as another mode of depoliticization through exhaustion; the waiting around involved in unemployment can be more taxing and tiring than employment. Along these lines, anthropologist Ghassan Hage has analyzed the enforced waiting that Lebanese migrants often face—the need to be patient, often at great lengths, in trying circumstances, waiting at checkpoints or for immigration papers—as a strategy of depoliticization, a technique of governmentality that encourages a "celebration of one's capacity to stick it out rather than calling for change" (2009:97). But does this exhaust the analysis of time in this context? Is this always a matter of empty, depoliticized time? What about the acts of people to fill this time meaningfully? Are there not also empirical instances in which the freeing up of time, in conditions of wageless life, has opened spaces of political possibility? David Graeber concludes his popular tome on debt by "putting in a good word for the nonindustrious poor…Insofar as the time they are taking time off from work is being spent with friends and family, enjoying and caring for those they love, they're probably improving the world more than we acknowledge" (2010:390). And in the context of Diyarbakır we may add, time spent negotiating a new politics of Kurdish struggle. Scholars of Kurds in Turkey have analyzed previous eras of rural-urban migration (largely due to the mechanization of agricultural) as having catalyzed political awakening among urbanized Kurds by bringing them together in cities and making them aware of their shared condition and struggle (Marcus 2007:17). Has forced displacement not done the same, by bringing displaced and dispossessed rural Kurds together in marginalized urban neighborhoods and subjecting them to similar experiences of impoverishment, poor labor conditions, and policing? The enforced 'free time' of economic inclusive exclusion

can also be seen a positive component of the practical groundwork for the emergence of a new wave of politicization. In the absence of other work, many young people have been encouraged to repay the sense of debt (*bedel*) they feel to the history of Kurdish political struggle, a debt to be repaid through political activism: by entering local governmental politics or civil society organizations, by turning out in large numbers for street protests, or, at a more mundane level, by keeping alive in everyday conversations and acts of interpretation the ambitions and imaginaries of Kurdish dissensus.

In short, the question of temporality lacks a single answer; both overworking and distress and underworking and activism were observed in my fieldwork. Both cases nevertheless evidence a temporal dimension of displacement and dispossession deserving ethnographic attention. With this in mind, we now turn to the ethnography, to accounts of displacement and its aftermath.

## NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT

### *1. Z: "Is there any factory better than a village?"*

Z was born some forty years ago in a village to the south of Diyarbakır not far from the provincial border separating Diyarbakır and Mardin. The village sits at the base of Karacadağ, a chain of once-active volcanoes that quite literally made Diyarbakır's existence possible, having deposited the layer of basalt from which the ancient city walls and the city's oldest houses, workplaces, and places of worship were built. Karacadağ's slopes are also believed to be one of the first sites of the domestication of wheat (Heun at al. 1997), with wild progenitor varieties still growing on its slopes. But though wheat has long been a mainstay of farming in many villages surrounding Diyarbakır, the precise location of Z's natal village, built on the old lava flow, was too rocky for much in the

way of farming. Only a few small plots had been cleared for subsistence farming and limited surplus production. More central to their village's livelihood, given the proximity of good mountain pastures or *mera*, was shepherding. Tending large flocks of sheep was what Z grew up doing, as did his father and his father's brothers.

In 1991, however, political conflict began to spread to the village. Z explains: "The people in the village, some were becoming village guards, some *Hızbullah.*[22] We took a look around and decided to become migrants." The decision, his younger brother later explained to me, was in fact taken not by his family alone. The leaders of the tribe to which his family belonged had met and taken the decision to refuse military pressure to become village guards. Once their refusal was made clear to local military representatives, residents were given a week to evacuate the village. Otherwise, as was publically announced in the center of the village, everything would be burned. People left in haste, and were, as Z put it, scattered across Turkey. Most came to Diyarbakır, but Z also counted more distant family in İzmir. As for his household, they came to Diyarbakır because one of his older brothers had already moved to the city in the middle of the 1980s to work in construction, and had rented a small apartment.

Though a week is fairly little time to leave a life and a way of making a living behind, the family was somewhat fortunate in that they were able to sell their animals (at least in comparison to those households that saw their animals expropriated by paramilitaries or had to sell much more quickly).[23] But, as with nearly everyone I talked

[22] Hızbullah in southeastern Turkey bears no relationship to the movement in Lebanon. It is the name of a violent religious paramilitary movement based in Diyarbakır and a few surrounding cities, which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s and called for the revolutionary overthrow of Turkey's secular state system, inspired by events in Iran. For more on Hızbullah, see chapter five.

[23] A number of people told me that their animals were stolen by paramilitaries, though I have not been able to locate any studies to confirm how common this was. I had no reason to doubt them, aside perhaps

to who was engaged in animal husbandry in the village and who was forced to sell this important stock of wealth in haste during the mess of forced migration, Z said that the animal traders offered his family well under half the going market price for their large holding of "small head" animals (i.e., sheep and goats, as opposed to "big head" animals, cattle), effectively cutting their main source of rural wealth in half in a single moment of exchange under emergency conditions. In Diyarbakır, the family—then composed of Z's elderly father, his ten brothers, two younger sisters, and his father's two brides—was able to stay for the first year in his brother's apartment, which Z remembers as extremely crowded. This is in fact a very common image in narratives of the first years after forced migration: an apartment or house with multiple families and 20 or more occupants, all struggling to rebuild life and livelihood in the city.

His recollections from the first few months, too, were not dissimilar to what I heard from many others: fear of venturing beyond the very immediate surroundings of the house, which some people described as a fear of getting lost in the unfamiliar new setting, and others as a fear born of the relatively regular occurrence of extrajudicial killings and disappearances on the city streets. In any event, after nearly a year of living in this way, the family found, through a relative, a plot on what was then considered the far reaches of the city: land off the main road to Elazığ that was, at the time, mostly cotton fields and unoccupied stretches of land sloping slowly down to the banks of the Tigris. With the money obtained from the sale of their animals, the family was able to afford the construction of a basic structure. The money was not enough to cover

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from the bitterness which some people harbor against those who became village guards. Some, though not all; some of my interlocutors showed understanding to those who decided to take up the state's offer, even if most people tended to use somewhat derogatory terms to describe those who agreed to take up arms for the state: "dishonor", "slavery", "betrayal", "selling oneself", "ignorant".

windows or doors, so they put up plastic to keep out some of the cold. Technically, access to this and most other plots in Aziziye could not be legally purchased; most of the land was not for sale, as the state has a claim, either through direct ownership through the Treasury (*Hazine*) or oversight via religious endowment (*vakıf*), to most unoccupied land in Turkey. In Aziziye, aside from a few spots of private ownership, the peri-urban land on which Z's family and others like him built their new squatted homes was no exception to this. Instead of buying land, most migrants who ended up in Aziziye seem to have done one of two things. Some went through an informal real estate agent of sorts who sold access to the land (based on exactly what claim to legitimacy I was unable to ascertain). While these agents were apparently up front about the land's indefinite legal status, they offered assurance that no authorities would bother them (for a brief mention of these agents, see Kalkınma Merkezi 2010). Others like Z's family built first on land that was, whatever its technical status, practically unoccupied, and hoped for the best. The hope was not unfounded. In Turkey, as in many state spaces where rapid, unplanned urbanization overwhelms the possibilities for state regulation of the process, state claims to land ownership have typically been enforced with an eye to pragmatism. That is, the state has often found it in its best interests to turn a blind eye to technically illegal practices, as this has allowed displaced and dispossessed populations to eke out a living in the city while authorities are able to evade or delay questions of responsibility and care. It is certainly more cost effective, after all, for a state to feign ignorance of things—and perhaps, come election time, to announce the legalization of all previously-built structures, in a well-known strategy of vote luring—than to take responsibility for the provision of adequate housing for newcomers. Of course, Turkey has at times intervened

to claim its right to unoccupied land. Forced evacuations of informal settlements in the name of 'urban renewal' are a part of the recent historical memory in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, and other cities remade by migration.[24] But in Diyarbakır, at least until quite recently,[25] the state's general preference has been to let things play out as they may.

In Z's family's case, the land's status was complicated. "We came to the city and we lived in a *gecekondu* [a home that is self-built, without official permission]…[The land] belonged to the Treasury." A man soon came claiming a prior right to the land. Again Z: "He said 'I'm the owner of this land,' and he wanted his money. But when he saw our condition, he showed understanding. 'Your condition's clear, you're living in a house without windows or a door', he said. We had put up plastic. He was understanding and didn't have us thrown out." Within a year, however, their house was destroyed by the state through an ironic turn of events. Toward the end of the 1990s, a state-designed affordable housing project broke ground on land abutting Aziziye, and built a new road and a new cluster of apartments, which were framed, at the time, as a solution to the city's housing crisis in the wake of migration. In constructing the road, the state destroyed Z's family's house, for which they received a small amount of monetary compensation (none of the surviving family members I talked to could recall

[24] The leveling of self-built, rural-urban migrant settlements on the outskirts of Turkish cities continues today with probably more intensity; one need only take the bus from the national capital Ankara's airport to the city center to see uncanny landscapes of the ghost-like foundations of razed homes and the footpaths and stairs linking them, and behind these emptied spaces, a horizon dominated by the pastel high-rises built by the powerful state housing authority TOKİ, allegedly as a solution to the problem of informal settlement.

[25] Things are quickly changing, though. On a recent trip to the city, two neighborhoods where I carried out fieldwork had a distinctly different skyline of TOKİ housing units in the place of razed informal housing. As I finish editing this chapter (early in 2012), large sections of Aziziye, which was, as of 2009, largely just one- or two-story informal structures built by the recently displaced, were being razed and replaced with apartment buildings. It remains unclear what the cityscape's skyline will be in another decade (or even sooner), but there is clearly significant political and financial support for this logic of the formalization and 'apartmentization' of displacement's typologies of housing.

exactly how much). But with this money, rather than settle in the new apartments—built ostensibly for recent migrants, though as far as I could ascertain, and I lived in those apartments for the two years of my fieldwork and also interviewed doormen about their buildings' occupants, modest as the rent and utilities fees were, few migrants could afford to live there—they chose another path. Z's household, now doubly displaced, instead elected to move to another unoccupied site a little farther down the road leading out of town, where they built, in Z's words, "exactly the same *gecekondu".*

The new house bordered Diyarbakır's main industrial park (*sanayi sitesi)*, which, though the term in English may conjure up images of large factory buildings lured by attractive incentives, designates in fact row upon row of small workshops with few employees. Here, as in many of the productive spaces that undergird countless spaces of neoliberal manufacturing worldwide (Elyachar 2005), off-the-books family labor, negotiated degrees of tax formality, and other work in market spaces between legality and illegality prevail. Despite the new home's proximity to the industrial site, however, no one in the family was employed there. By chance, before the road that caused this second displacement was constructed, the family had built a *bakkal* (a small neighborhood market selling all sorts of daily necessities, from diapers, candy, and produce to *kaçak* cigarettes) close to their first home in the city, and the same process of construction that led to the destruction of their first home not only spared the shop; it left it in a much more advantageous location, benefitting not only from road traffic but also from its newfound proximity to salaried apartment dwellers.

Most of Z's younger brothers worked in the *bakkal*.[26] Additionally, one of Z's brothers also had found work as a *kapıcı*[27], a doorman, in the nearby apartments that effected the family's second displacement. All of his male siblings, once old enough, entered the circuits of off-the-books seasonal farm and factory work, on hazelnut farms along the Black Sea, cotton fields in the hinterlands of Urfa and Adana, or in tomato paste factories outside of İzmir (the latter through paternal kinship ties). Through the combination of these varied and irregular incomes, the family tried to make a living in the city. "The struggle to stay alive, *hayatta kalma mücadelesi*", was the phrase that Z and his brothers preferred, and however clichéd this phrase may ring to many readers familiar with the discourses of the economy here and elsewhere in Turkey, there is a certain unsettling truth to it. As Michael Denning notes (2010), the 'free' in 'free labor', after all, mostly entails, for those dispossessed, expropriated, and forced to depend on wages, being free to live a life of economic insecurity and the haunt of constant precariousness.

Troubles pursued the family. Not long after migration, the elderly father passed away. Z's explanation, echoing that of his brothers, was: "My father died because of migration; he couldn't adjust. Actually, after migration, quite a few old people, like my

[26] In Diyarbakır as in many American convenience stores, sugar and tobacco were the mainstays of the shop's profit. In the case of the American corner store, one must also add lottery tickets, an interesting object for economic-anthropological research in America's deindustrialized urban spaces. For a related example, see Wacquant (1999) for notes on the "underground lottery of the ghetto known as the policy or numbers game", along with Light (1977). In Turkey's southeast, the spread of *bahis* (illegal internet gambling, mostly on soccer matches) is widespread. Many teahouses in the city provide spaces for internet gamblers to watch matches on big-screen televisions, with computers for making bets tucked into small shop spaces nearby. As one interviewee said, "in the world, it's Las Vegas, in Turkey it's Las Diyarbakır, Las Batman".

[27] While being a doorman is an unenviable position in the value hierarchies of work in Turkey, for generations of rural-urban migrants the position has been a coveted one, primarily because, whatever the relative indignities of subordination that one must suffer, the burden of rent is evaded, and however limited one's income, there are opportunities for side jobs for doormen and families members, as in, for instance, housecleaning for wives (see Özyeğin 2002). In Diyarbakır's constrained job market, many reportedly have to bribe their way into this job.

father, couldn't adjust and died." One of Z's younger brothers later fleshed out this etiology, explaining that his father had in fact died of tuberculosis. But rather than attribute this to the combination of age, living conditions, and stress, the family preferred another explanation—one not unique to them—and saw his death as caused by an incurable longing for the life he left behind. His death left the eldest brother of the family, a few years older than Z, as the effective head of the household. Meanwhile, looming over the shop, one of the family's main sources of income, was the threat of destruction at any moment by the state, should legal codes of ownership be enforced. Z and his brothers regularly complained that they couldn't lay a nail for fear that any investment in the structure would be in vain, should the land be claimed and, like their previous house, leveled. And, as it happened, in a recent trip to Aziziye, I found that not only the shop but most of the homes around it had been demolished, with nothing left of the shop but a pile of stones and some chickens picking through some trash. The family made an agreement with the municipality that bought them some more time, and rebuilt their shop—"is this the fourth or fifth time?" asked one of Z's youngest brothers as we chatted and caught up, too young to remember all the destructions and reconstructions—a little farther up the road.

Years after resettling in Diyarbakır, Z had married and had three children. Unable to find regular work, he tried to secure a livelihood by other means. He bought an iron pushcart and outfitted it with a pressed sandwich maker. The pushcart was parked in a location Z chose with an eye to practicality: close to an electricity line that could be tapped to power the sandwich press, under the shade of a mulberry tree, a stone's throw from the family store, and most importantly, on a footpath linking Aziziye to two nearby

schools. Most of his customers were children buying a sandwich and a box of overly sweet juice before school or on lunch break.

The neighborhood behind the cart did, superficially at least, resemble a village.[28] But looks can be deceiving; the livelihood practices common to Aziziye's displaced households bear only a surface resemblance to those preceding the waves of rural displacement and dispossession. As one Diyarbakır based NGO's report on the socioeconomic conditions of Aziziye suggests, most people, having been cut off from rural livelihoods, have taken to creating whatever livelihoods they can within the limits of their new home (Kalkınma Merkezi 2010). In ways similar to what Asef Bayat calls the "quiet encroachment" of the urban poor in Tehran and Cairo (2000, 2004), across the city thousands of people like Z have seized on spaces along roads, which offer a chance for commerce without paying rent or the various fees and taxes required to run an on-the-books commercial venture, and have staked their hopes in remaining off the radar of the forces of economic regulation, such as the municipal police (*zabita*)—or at least being able to negotiate an agreement with them when they come by.

Z identified as unemployed, despite the observable fact that he clearly worked all day—making sandwiches, fixing flat bike tires at another small roadside stand he opened—and received money in exchange for this labor. Yet he did not value what he did as 'work'; these were rather acts done to eke out a minimal living in the city. Despite spending nearly every day standing on the street, leaving early in the morning and returning late in the evening, the wages he earned were not enough for a secure life for

[28] As noted in the text above, I happened to live in the housing units just next to Aziziye, and my daily bus route to the city passed through the neighborhood. Not that often, but still perhaps once every two months or so, a slow-moving cow would block the road, leading to tsk-tsking and derisive comments about the allegedly ignorant, backward mindset of the squatter settlement's inhabitants from people who boarded the bus in the middle-class housing units.

his family. Lacking the money to support an independent household, he and his wife and children shared a house with his deceased father's two brides and a number of his young brothers, a situation that he complained about, but for which he saw no immediate solution in lieu of steady work.

But another important element in the idea he was voicing is, I think, the specter of past rural productivity. Z came of working age within the practices and knowledge appropriate to the rural productive economy, and invested something of himself there, acquiring a handy familiarity with animals and agricultural work. He made clear, in narrating his life's trajectory, that his first and staying understanding of his life was formed within the possibilities that the village political economy provided. Transplanted to the outskirts of the city and having lost all of the household's (mostly animal) wealth, save for what was now tied up in the store, Z was one of many older men—older signaling in this context old enough to have made a practical and imaginative investment in rural life—who were largely left to idealize a home and rhythm of life to which they, in all probability, will not return. He asked in one interview, "Is there any factory better than a village? There's land, water, there's everything." However, he acknowledged that to return to his natal village would not only require the assurance of peace and an end to the threat of violent conflict breaking out around the village. The family would furthermore need a large sum of wealth in order to reestablish a viable rural livelihood (investing in animals, repairing or rebuilding stables, and so on). He noted, "One doesn't return to the village without money…some apparently have returned to our village, but we weren't able to. Here in the city, you sell to live, even if just *simit*."

Here it is worthwhile to pause Z's account and to call attention to the imagery of

*simit*. A savory ring-shaped bread smothered in sesame seeds and a fine coating of molasses, *simit* is a ubiquitous and cheap form of street food, found across Turkey. Its inexpensive nature also gives it a place in popular narratives of poverty, as in the *Arabesk* song I recently heard in a taxi about a man who sells his land in the village and moves to Ankara only to waste his wealth frivolously, and who then must learn the price of *simit* and *ayran* (a stock image of the cheapest way to fill one's stomach).[29] Like fire, holes in shoes, and crowded apartments, this is one of a handful of stock images that surfaced throughout my research, begging the question of whether its function might have less to do with faithful representation than narrative, or more accurately, rhetorical efficacy. For instance, many of the city's displaced newcomers I met framed selling *simit* as a last resort of sorts. Consider an exchange I had with two brothers working in small-scale trade. I regularly spent time in their sliver of a shop, chatting and taking notes on their account-keeping techniques (and their impressive ability to recall the details of their balances, even the ones they did not bother to record on the back of a cigarette carton). On this occasion, they were complaining about the purported unwillingness of kids in their neighborhood of Hançepek to work. Claiming that marijuana, petty theft, and organized crime (*mafyacılık*, by which they meant drug trade) had habituated the neighborhood's youth to a life of idleness, they employed the image of an older man (who ideally should be enjoying the respect and right to rest that comes with age in Kurdish culture) forced to do the tiring and unsavory work of selling *simit,* in order to chastise the young for their presumed disinclination to work: "When you see 65 year old men with a tray of *simit* on their head, going from coffeehouse to coffeehouse, then certainly the kids too should be doing something". We shall return to the question of

[29] On the anthropology of Arabesk, see the work of Martin Stokes, especially 1992 and 2010.

stock images and rhetoric below; meanwhile, let us make a note of the significance of *simit* as a narrative referent and return to Z's account.

Continuing with his explanation of the practical difficulties involved in village return, Z went on to explain, "In our village you need animals to make a living. Otherwise you're in bad shape." In this assessment, he was not alone. Many human rights and NGO reports that touch on the obstacles to village return in the wake of forced migration cite the financial obstacles to reestablishing a viable rural livelihood facing many displaced families as among the most important practical barriers to return.[30] Few of the people I met who expressed a wish to return—and most older people did—were confident that they could afford to re-establish a productive livelihood in the countryside after having lost or liquidated what they were able to salvage of their forms of rural wealth—cash that most reported as having been quickly spent in the city, with the new costs of living (bills, rent, transportation) and the challenges of getting by on what is almost uniformly the sub-minimum-wage, irregular, and off-the-books work of dispossession. Again Z: "One needs money to return to the village…besides the cost of cement and windows, there's the stable, the seeds, the fertilizer." He characterized his life in the city as a day-to-day mode of existence ("*biz günlük olarak yaşıyoruz ha*"), never being able to "make an investment for the future":

> Here getting by depends on what we earn daily. I've been doing day labor since I migrated. I worked in construction, I lugged propane tanks, I was a garbage picker, and I was a porter. There's nothing else to do…Nowadays I say, if only I had work. But there's thousands of unemployed like me, so I have no hope at all. Think of it, I even applied to one of the worst professions, being a doorman

[30] Sources also mention ongoing military bans on return to certain rural geographies (as recently as 2011, a few of my interlocutors whom I kept in touch with after fieldwork reported being unable to return to their villages, where some still planted grapes or visited relatives' graves during religious holidays) and the sporadic persistence of armed conflict as barriers to village return.

> (*kapıcı)*[31], but for that they wanted four or five thousand lira [as bribe]. I don't have that kind of money. Even if they wanted one thousand, I don't have that. Day to day we live, day to day.

The pushcarts he made a living by were insecure not only in terms of the low, unpredictable income they brought. Neighborhood thieves also broke into them semi-regularly, raiding the locked compartment where he kept the sandwich ingredients and the boxes of sugary fruit juice. One of our interviews happened to take place not long after one such event:

> A few weeks ago, a thief got into the cart, and he took whatever was there: the fruit juice, chocolate bars, and all the ingredients for *tost*. I went to the police, and the man said if he filed a report that it would just burn me too, since my work is illegal. You're right, I said, but what else am I to do? It's not that I want to stand outdoors morning to night selling *tost*, but what am I to do? I have to. If need be, I'll collect garbage. In the end, I didn't register a complaint because I met the thief face to face. He was a young kid. I asked him, why did you do this? He said, I was hungry so I stole. My own kids came to mind. If I leave them hungry, they'll steal too. I forgot about it and went home.

Here, in a long passage that touches on many of the same themes as above, Z paints a bleak picture of life in the city.

> We now have to leave in the summers to work elsewhere. In the winter, we return to Diyarbakır. For 14 years we've been leaving to pick hazelnuts, cotton, tomatoes.
>
> *Vallahi*, I just leave the house in the morning and return home late at night, and if I sit down for a bit, suddenly it's already morning again. We're chasing after

[31] A *kapıcı* functions something like a superintendent in the US, yet with more of a sense of servitude. Typically doormen live in the entry level or basement of an apartment and have reduced or free rent in exchange for tending the building and being on call for its residents. A teacher friend of mine has told me about what he termed the inferiority complex of the sons and daughters of doormen in his school. And indeed, I've seen doormen in my apartments in Diyarbakır and Ankara treated with the casual disdain often shown by the salaried classes to those who make a living from serving them (for a brilliant analysis of the history and implications of this social and economic rift/relation, see Gorz 1989:6-7). The literature on rural-urban migration in Turkey is full of mentions of this profession. Readers in English can see, for a sociological perspective, Özyeğin 2002. Interestingly—and I am not sure how widespread this is in Turkey—a number of unemployed and underemployed men I met in Diyarbakır mentioned, like Z, looking for work as a doorman, but lacking the requisite entry fee—more accurately, the bribe—of a few thousand lira that one pays to a contractor as a new building is still in construction. At one point, I mentioned these stories to a few friends in Diyarbakır, and they replied with the kind of shrugging disinterest that suggests I was again just asking them to explain was mere common knowledge in the city.

> bread, I mean, with this pushcart…If I sit idly by, then the children will go hungry.
>
> Maybe if we had a certain income, I'd want to take my children, I mean, let's say it's springtime. Now and then, we'd take our kids for a stroll around town, eat out, have a picnic. Well, those days are far from us. To us there's neither spring nor winter, neither spring nor fall. That is, to us it makes no difference, as it's the same thing every day, the same. This is our situation: we're chasing after bread.
>
> Right now my little brothers are in their twenties, and they too don't have a right and proper job. I've one brother who should be going to the [college entrance exam prep] lesson houses, but we can't afford to send him. So we say to him, forget about studying, go work in the construction sites[32]…So that's that, I mean, there's no work for us to do. None.
>
> Now I've got five kids, no social security no insurance, no job, I've got a pushcart, so we [I] come here and sell *tost*…Then someone comes from the school saying 'you have to consider your children's nutrition'. They say, 'you're should leave this or that in your children's lunchbox.' But in our house, those things aren't to be found. It's either a boiled a potato, a boiled egg, a tomato, some bread…The teachers say, why do you every day leave your kids the same things? Well, because there's nothing. And they're right, I too want to leave my kids one day with fruit, the other, maybe cake, you know, let their nutrition be different. I too am aware of this. But when you don't have it, necessarily you leave them what you have.
>
> So you get sad, you constantly get sad. You sleep because when you sleep you forget, but then you wake up and you remember, 'you have to consider your children's nutrition'.

Approximately a year after this interview I returned to the site where Z parked his pushcarts. The sandwich cart, his main venture, was gone. I tracked down his younger brothers, who explained that, having taken a job as a night watchman job in a bakery, the room where he slept had a leak in the heating stove's pipes. Z seems to have passed away in his sleep. Among other unequal patterns of distribution is that of workplace risk.

His phrase "no better factory than a village" hints at the matter of idyllic

[32] Incidentally, in the three years that have passed since this interview, the brother that he mentioned did indeed earn a position in a two-year program, the equivalent of an Associates Degree in the US, in civil engineering. Upon graduation, however, unable to find work, as of spring 2012, he was working in a small stationery shop that the family opened by taking a cash loan from a relative.

constructions of the countryside that we shall take up more directly in the next chapter. For now, let us turn to a number of additional accounts from this period of forced migration, keeping in mind the aim of exploring the profound transformations brought about by displacement and dispossession by way of the stories of ordinary people narrating changes to life and livelihoods in the wake of these transformations.

*2. Baran: "Here, if one day you don't work, you go hungry"*

Baran, a man in his mid 40s, came from a village outside of Lice, and his way of earning a living after dispossession and displacement is not dissimilar to Z's. Our first interview, arranged by a mutual friend, took place just next to his pushcart, which he kept parked on a corner in a neighborhood of concrete midrises mostly rented or owned by families who came to Diyarbakır in the 1990s. He sold roasted sunflower and squash seeds in cones of rolled up scrap paper, and most of his patrons were men sitting and chatting or playing games in a few nearby coffeehouses. He had a large scar on his hand from where he claimed police had held a lighter to it, trying to extract information on the whereabouts of a relative who had joined the PKK. But before the scar and the string of police detentions and experiences with torture in Diyarbakır in the 1990s, like nearly everyone who came to the city in the first part of that decade, it was political violence that provoked the move. Villagers refused to accept the spread of the paramilitary system, and so found their village burned by the military, which in his case transformed such familiar stuff of village life as animals in stables into distressing dreams:

> We didn't come out of desire but out of fear. They burned our village. Already they were burning everywhere around us. Like everybody else, we were forced to flee. It was the end of 1992, the beginning of 1993.

> How can I explain? As the village guard system spread, villages were no longer at ease. Once they set up a checkpoint there, you can't raise animals. Village life is raising animals, and some farming. What else does one do in a village?
>
> The sounds of the animals caught inside, the women screaming, that smoke, that fire, the sound of children, it doesn't go from my mind. They burn the houses and you're there looking at the smoke. It enters into my dreams.

With two central foundations of everyday life, home and livelihood, radically destabilized, Baran struggled not just to rebuild these, but also to adjust to the small things of life in a new setting, such as buying yogurt.

> Housing, it wasn't to be found. And we didn't know how to go about it. I came with my things loaded on a truck. I found a house, two rooms. The truck broke down on the road. In fleeing, nothing went right.
>
> We were strangers. Risks were high, we couldn't even go out to buy yogurt. One relative said, 'follow your neighbor and wherever he buys things from, you too buy from there'. So I started to orient myself to my neighbors.

"I couldn't find a job or anything", he continued, describing how he and a friend started to share the work of the latter's street cart. (Diyarbakır is thought to have more than 15,000 street peddlers, a drastic increase from pre-migration levels). "I got job as a peddler and I'm still doing that job, but now I work on my own. It's a small share of the market, but there's [$5-7] left to me at day's end."

In contrast to the image of the rural migrant who grows accustomed to the alleged small luxuries of life in the city—an image I not infrequently heard from the city's settled merchant and shop keeping classes, some (though not all) of whom held migrants in rather negative regard, seeing them as indolent, dependent, and uncultivated people who ruined the city they knew—Baran was, like nearly all the older migrants I met, unequivocal in his wish to return. Political fears combined with the general precariousness of life in the city made village return an attractive, if unlikely, vision:

> How can I say it? Our culture didn't suit here. Your psychology's ruined. You're like a fish out of water. There was the fear of being killed. I mean you couldn't think of economy, because it's as if you have an enemy and he's following you. So no job, no food, no savings. Stress—my balance was ruined and I would lose my mind with all these difficulties. I mean, think of it, I found a house but I'm unable to get by.
>
> You live big problems, trauma. You can't carry out your basic human duties. Because you think, when will they come for me, how, where? Every hour, every minute I was thinking this. I had a relative; he was eighteen when we found him in the state hospital morgue. Sometimes I wished I had died there.

Baran echoes many forced migrants I met—echoes, at least, those who came of age in the village—in his wish to return to his village if only circumstances were right. "What business do I have here? I wouldn't hesitate a second if it were legal for us to return to our village. Like I said, if things were at ease, I'd return. I'd live on my own land. Even the littlest thing there was better than anything here. In the village at least you feel that you're free, but here how could that be the case? Here, if one day you don't work, you go hungry." The social genesis of his desire to return is obvious enough. What Z called day to day living defined Baran's livelihood as well. With his roasted seed pushcart he found a small "share of the market", as he put it, and seeing the precariousness of work around him, he held to it. But it kept him in constant livelihood insecurity. Baran, like Z, finds himself, after dispossession, self-employed, reliant on a meager, unpredictable source of income, largely de-linked from dependable social safety nets, beset by worries about how to make a living, and reminiscing about a village life that, despite all its inequities, nevertheless guaranteed one's existence.

### *3. Mehmet: "I was paying them installments on something they burned, that was very hard"*

Another illustration of the aftermath of forced migration comes from a man in his

mid-40s who was living in the neighborhood of Melik Ahmet in Suriçi, within Diyarbakır's old basalt walls. He came from a village outside of the town of Hazro, where, by his account, his was among the two or three most well off households in the village. "I had a nice overcoat, not everyone could have such things", he bragged, adding that his wealth was such that he could sit and not work if he wished: "My wife used to say, get up, work! But I would hire workers instead. What I mean is, our situation was good." In Diyarbakır, he lived in a modest home in a neighborhood where people complained about pickpockets, petty theft, and drug use and dealing. Sitting on floor cushions in a sparsely decorated living room, he apologized a number of times, saying that he wished I could have seen him in the village. There he could have shown me true hospitality, he said, and recalled times when his father could afford to sacrifice a lamb for every visitor. In part, this was a conversational habit of self-deprecation in hospitality; in fact he was extremely generous, bringing plate after plate of fresh fruit, nuts, and fruit leather and pots of tea. But it was also about the specter of comparison haunting displaced families, particularly older people who carry the memory of rural livelihoods and a certain security of existence, and who filter much of their urban experience through these memories. This very process is the subject of the next chapter, though, so here I merely note it as we turn to Mehmet's more general remarks on village life. "Growing up in the village", Mehmet said,

> I remember that it wasn't like today's Kurdish cities. Animals, vineyards, gardens, that's what we lived by. It's very hard for a person to break from the village life and to come here and not feel like a stranger. I mean, you come with no profession.
>
> When we came, there were ten in our household. Working, eating, it was very hard. There wasn't any work to be had. Think: we sold the animals at below half

> price. When you think that there were 1,000 or more animals in every village, naturally no one would buy them at the animal market.

The significance of animals as a form of rural wealth in the southeast, a region where shepherding plays an important role in the rural economy, and the impact on household livelihoods of so many families having to, in the chaotic days of displacement, sell their flocks at far below market price is something we have seen elsewhere in this chapter. Mehmet went on to describe in more detail his early years in the city, noting first the number of years he paid rent.[33] "For nine years, I paid rent. I've pushed a street cart for more than 15 years. Actually, for 10 years, I sold things without a cart, just out of hand, in this city." A few years ago, he took out a bank loan and bought a vehicle to transport everyday goods from wholesalers to shops. But he was involved in a bad traffic accident and suffered lasting physical injuries that have kept him from work. The village seemed to him the only option for a viable livelihood, but as he makes clear, there are obstacles to return. "Actually my brother returned to the village. If I had the chance I too would return, but how? If I go, I'd need a house, how's that going to happen? I still owe a lot on the car. And I'm not well and can't work now."

He took a dim view of life in the city, and echoed Z's sense of life in the city as one self-same day after another, yet in this instance from the perspective of someone not as busy as he wished to be. "It's morning off to the teahouse and evening to home. If there's a bit of bread around, we eat that." The specter of village productivity and the sense of possibility associated with rural livelihoods alongside urban limitations surfaced

[33] One wonders about the degree to which applying for compensation (*tazminat*) might introduce into ways of talking about forced migration certain discursive habits. Thinking about village life in terms of what can be quantified (acres of land, numbers of fruit and nut trees, number of cattle and sheep) or talking about city life in terms of years of rent paid—all play a part in the application process for compensation. This recalls the analytical distinction between the last chapter and this one, and suggests how written and oral rhetorical conventions bleed into one another.

often in his account: “If I could just bring yogurt back from the village, we’d have a way of getting by, but you can’t do that here either.” Echoing a familiar theme in rural-urban migration studies—a widespread perception among newcomers of a lack of solidarity and mutual support in the city versus the country—he reflected, “In the city, it’s not clear who’s hungry and who’s full. Everyone looks after himself, thinks for himself.” Things were better, he repeated often, in the village:

> Our life in the village, we had a two-story house, it had a living room and a bathroom. I took farm credit from the state; I made a stable for my cows. And it’s all gone. We came here, and I was paying them installments [to the state] for something they burned. That was very hard for me. Go now and look, it’s not apparent even where the house was—as if it were all flat ground.
>
> Our vineyards, the farming, the animal work, it went well. Our pocket was full. We planted barley and the money would last us a year. I planted a little tobacco. I would buy animals and turn them, buying when they were small, fattening them on our pastures then selling them for nearly double the price. I would buy at 500 and sell at 800. Here, that too is not an option.

As noted in the first chapter, economic hierarchies in the countryside, save for those between large landholders and the rest, often mean little after migration. Mehmet represents how someone of regard in the village was rendered equal to all forced migrants, and the sting this leaves.

*4. The Şimşek family*

In a neighborhood inhabited almost entirely by the displaced, in a part of the city dominated by cement midrise rentals, the Şimşeks, who lived until the early 1990s in a village outside of Lice, owned a modest apartment. The family first lived in a rental, but they saved, sold family gold, and added that to the money they received upon the sale of their animals to purchase a small place. (In the 1990s in Diyarbakır, it was possible to

find modestly priced housing.) The fact that they owned their home should not be seen as a sign of relative wealth; many displaced families, more than one would guess, were able to purchase homes. As one report on the aftermath of displacement notes, "When displaced families first came to Diyarbakır, by selling whatever they had, before all else they worked hard to acquire a place for the family to take shelter. Currently, approximately half (49 percent) of [the surveyed displaced] families live in houses they own" (Kalkınma Merkezi 2006: 29). Newcomers recurrently summarized to me their early years in the city as an effort to find a place of their own, and to avoid rent.

The older family members were without work, though when their health still permitted they had traversed the country as seasonal agricultural workers. An important source of income and insurance for the house came from a daughter who had found work at a fast food restaurant in a shopping center, where she earned minimum wage and had health insurance.

This passage—long and minimally edited—begins with the recollections of the oldest man in the house. Later his wife and son-in-law enter the conversation.

> The village head (*muhtar*) called everyone and said 'gather in the central square'. Then they started to burn houses. Then I left my animals in town [Lice], and first we came to Lice, then to Diyarbakır. A house, a blanket, nothing. If you happened to have had money on you, then you had it. Otherwise, well…
>
> If the price for the animals was two, we sold for one. We had to sell. We looked for a rental. We had no furniture, not even bread. No one would hire us.
>
> We suffered, we had no security. We couldn't go out. There was Hızbullah.
>
> We worked and what not, but the house was a rental. The kids worked. That's how we ate our bread.
>
> Think, the village is destroyed, and you're in dire straits. Vineyards, fields, gardens, there was everything. But they burned it, they destroyed it. Quite a few

people went and their places were deserted. They [their gardens, fields] were without anyone to look after them for 16 years.

We dealt with animals, with the land. We had a lot of land. I personally had a mill. In the village, it's such that however many vineyards or gardens you have, then that's how much work you have.

(Auntie interjects): We'd water the onions, the vegetables, and the wheat. We'd spend our time and patience with them. We'd hoe the fields.

(Main speaker): My land was extensive. There were only two families in the village above me [in terms of economic hierarchy]. I mean, I had plenty of land, plenty of animals.

And money? We would buy more animals or things for the house, and the money we earned stayed in our house. Money was just for exchange. We'd sell grapes, walnuts, almonds, and we'd buy clothing, basic things. In the village, money doesn't go far. There's no coffeehouse, there's no this or that.

Then one day we looked, they had set fire to everything. "You're terrorists, we're going to kill you all". This they were yelling and screaming. You know how they say during the apocalypse everything's all mixed up in everything else? It was just like that.

I took my kids and without even being able to grab a single hair from our house we escaped to Lice, then to Diyarbakır. Then I went back to Lice and sold my animals.

(Auntie): They burned the village. They burned my house. They burned my stable. They burned my garden. They burned my trees. We fled. We came on foot. We were in bad shape, and along the way no one would take us in. 'If we take you in, if we help you, they'll burn our village too.' People we had known for years, with whom we had relations [unspecified of what precise nature], they wouldn't extend a hand. But we're not resentful. Maybe if we were in the same situation, we too wouldn't have helped. In any case, it's a good thing that our road didn't pass through Kulp. If it had, they would have killed us. But whatever it is, the things they did can't be explained. There aren't even any bones left from my son. Our village was beautiful. Life was good: our mother's land, our father's. Everything was there. And then they rip us apart like you would tear your worst enemy to shreds.

So then we came to the city but we didn't even have a blanket to spread on the sidewalk. Our son-in-law had a relative here. We slept, ten of us, with two blankets on the bare cement floor. It went on like this for ten years.

There wasn't work to be had. And the police wouldn't let our children be. When [a guerrilla male relative] died they took my son into torture for ten days. The things we endured!

(Main male speaker): I'll never forget, one time the sole of my son's shoe was ripped, so I burned some plastic and let it drip into the hole to keep the water out. There were days when we couldn't eat bread.

My youngest son started selling *simit* on the street, and some people were always buying from him. Later, we checked up on him and realized he was selling to Hızbullah. So we immediately got him inside and didn't let him out again. At that time, easily 10 to 15 people were being killed every day, and if they weren't killed they were kidnapped and disappeared.

(Son in law): I tell you, were they to excavate underneath some of these mosques in Diyarbakır, the bodies of quite a few Kurdish patriots would turn up.

(Main male speaker): We couldn't go outside, we were terrified.

(Auntie): When we came, when we went to the market or wherever, they'd say "where did you come from?" And when we said "from Lice" they'd say "you're terrorists."

In the village we'd at least have bread and wild greens, but in the city we don't have such possibilities. Think, we had 14 cows.

And I mean, we'd go to harvest the crops or to tend the vineyards, and you weren't even aware of how the time passed. Because resources were plentiful in our village, there was more work to do every day, and we weren't even aware of how the time passed.

[Main male speaker]: We weren't thinking of applying for compensation for our losses. But then again, it's not like we were taking someone else's money. I mean the state took everything we had, cruelly, like a non-believer. So we thought, let's take what we deserve. But they rejected our application. We objected to our lawyers, but there's still no answer.

I feel it wouldn't be right if we were to return to the village because we're poor here. But if I return without qualification to the land of my father and grandfather, that's beautiful. May that day come and I won't look back.

Present in this passage are a number of the concerns raised in the outset regarding the peculiarity of oral accounts and questions of temporality. Rather than analyze this

passage in isolation, however, let us, by way of a conclusion, consider the broader matters raised in these four cases.

## CONCLUSION

One way to read these accounts is in terms of the detail they shed on the means by which the destabilization of livelihoods through displacement and dispossession took place. Across the accounts, we hear of animals sold at great losses, gardens, vineyards, groves, and other rural small-scale agricultural and horticultural transformations of landscapes destroyed or left to fall into disrepair after their caretakers were forced to leave. The emptied and sometimes burned-out shells of homes too, which are a part of household livelihoods insofar as they save one from rent, were destroyed or abandoned to ruin by neglect, as were other built structures of rural livelihoods such as stables. Family gold holdings were brought to jewelers or moneychangers and converted into cash.

Yet what if we bracket the status of these accounts as historical documents? If we set aside questions of the actual size of landholdings or stables, or the specific sequence of the events described, or even their actual occurrence in the exact ways described, then what else might come to light? For one thing, there is a strong sense of what Walter Ong (2002) identified as the situational nature of oral thinking—thinking through familiar objects or scenes. We recall the prevalence of one such scene: that of burning, of fire. It is remarkable that virtually everyone in this chapter, and indeed, virtually everyone I spoke with for this research, described the means by which they came to the city not through the more general description of village evacuations, but village burnings. Given what is known about the processes of village evacuations, such descriptions are almost

certainly accurate. That said, there are other questions to be asked of this material. Burning stables, holes in children's shoes, having to sell *simit*: these and other images followed me throughout my fieldwork, turning up across interviews and everyday exchanges on the subject of forced migration. At work here would seem to be not just 'the real', but a storied real, a process of adapting elements of a genre of migration stories and the trials of life in the city after displacement that, when included in a story, add to its credibility. The reason that these images come up so often, I think, is not that people wish to avoid talking about the actualities of the past. It lies in a desire to make their stories socially recognizable and legible, and to indeed become more truthful, more convincing, by including these elements. In other words, the reasons behind the employment of this genre, to return to Trouillot's remarks, would seem to have to do with the stakes behind these stories. Marking one's story as authentic through the use of such narrative devices matters to speakers because the truth of their accounts matters, given the history (until recently, at least) of the denial of the extent of village evacuations. Simply put, people care that what happened is not silenced.

That these accounts are often used to morally and politically condemn the state is also something that surfaces. However, to better appreciate the dynamics of discourse, moral condemnation, and political stance taking—of taking issue, through language, with a particular "distribution of the sensible" (Ranciere 2010)—we must turn to the material central to the next chapter, where the work of rhetoric as a means of moral and political evaluation and condemnation is more central.

# CHAPTER 3
# TOMATOES THIS BIG: RURAL IDYLL AFTER DISPOSSESSION

## THE POLITICS OF BREAKFAST

Just north of Diyarbakır, on the west bank of the Tigris, sits a satellite of housing units—long rows of low rises cut by a few roads, with a handful of markets and teahouses, a neighborhood health clinic, and a bus stop—largely disconnected from the rest of the city. The official name for the units is 450 Houses. Unofficially, they are known as disaster housing (Diken 2007), an epithet pointing to the fact that the units have, despite their relative youth, been wrapped up in an impressive string of political and natural mishaps of local and transnational scale.

The settlement was first built to house victims of an earthquake in the nearby town of Lice in 1975. The earthquake destroyed nearly 8,000 homes and damaged 8,000 more, rendering tens of thousands of people homeless overnight. Within a few years, though, the units were mostly abandoned; living in a low rise apartment complex proved as undesirable as the other forms of emergency housing,[34] and residents soon returned to Lice to spaces and functions they more associated with home (for instance, a place for animals, a plot for horticulture and viniculture, a clay oven, and a home built from materials suitable to the extremes of summers and winters in southeastern Turkey).

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[34] Emergency tents and prefabricated housing units provided by Ankara and imported from Europe helped to ease the immediate housing crisis, as did international financial assistance led by Saudi Arabia and Libya (Mitchell 1977). Though largely forgotten outside the region, the earthquake has had a number of lasting effects, both on Lice's landscape and on international disaster relief practices. In an area outside the collapsed old city center, which was fatefully built of rubble stone, there are remnants of Yugoslavian, Swiss, and French style prefabricated homes. And in the organization Oxfam, the use of an igloo type of relief housing was abandoned after its poor results in Lice.

A few years later, Ankara faced a rather different disaster when it was forced to provide temporary shelter for tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds who crossed the border into Turkey in the 1980s, fleeing chemical-weapons attacks on northern Iraqi settlements. Most of the refugees were concentrated closer to the Iraqi border—in Hakkari or Yüksekova. The ability of those cities to provide emergency shelter was limited, however, and the state intervened to relocate a number of the refugees to Diyarbakır, where 450 Houses was again put to use.[35] Yet these occupants, too, soon abandoned the units, such that when a few hundred thousand displaced rural Kurds began arriving to the city in the early 1990s, 450 Houses was purposed once again to settle people uprooted by disaster.

Under the shade of a mulberry tree outside a teahouse in 450 Houses, a man in his late forties—call him Ahmet—described his trajectory from a village outside of Lice to the settlements. His village was burned in August 1994. He repeated the precise date frequently throughout our conversation, in a habit of specifying and reiterating dates that I often encountered in forced migrants' narratives. (This is possibly an effect of the various bureaucratic processes of verification that one must go through in order to apply for government compensation for losses incurred as a result of counterinsurgency techniques such as forced migration and environmental destruction—an instance of the

[35] In a reflection of the ambivalent feelings, at best, that some of the city's already-settled (i.e. in the city before forced migration) self-described "true Diyarbakırites" hold regarding the recent direction of Kurdish nationalist political discourse and practice, a number of older middle class professionals I met, many of whom were distinctly concerned that I would portray their city as only marked by poverty and political dissensus, painted a history of a tranquil, genteel urban life before the "peşmerge" arrived from northern Iraq. One woman, who proudly traced her genealogy to Arabistan and underscored a number of times that she was not Kurdish, claimed that no one had an interest in Kurdish music or Kurdish language and "linguistic rights" before this period. This is certainly a questionable history of the reemergence of Kurdish nationalism, but it is interesting in that it repeats the notion that the "true" reasons for this recent historical development lie outside of Turkey and its history of dealing with the existence of Kurds within its borders.

textual habits identified in the previous chapter bleeding into the oral.) Whatever the reason, Ahmet noted, explaining the state evacuation and destruction of his village, "the people had to migrate to the city. And we migrated. We came here." Many first stayed in tents, depots, or with relatives, while a group of men, Ahmet remembers, petitioned the governor for permission to settle in 450 Houses. Permission was granted, but the years since seem to have left Ahmet with the feeling that, beyond that initial assistance, he and his neighbors had been abandoned. "The state at no time supported us, at no time lent assistance. Do you know? They gave support to those migrants in the city, even though they made many mistakes [here he implies that they supported the PKK]. Here if once a month, *once a month*, [the state] had supported us, we would still have given thanks. But this? Now that they left us in the city's outskirts, we are left in need of bread". Of life since, he had little good to say. He had no steady work, like most of his neighbors; a public health study focused on rates of and reasons for diarrhea, carried out in 450 houses by two specialists from the local university (Elmacı and Özelçi 2001), claims that a majority of the neighborhood's residents are either without any work or rely mainly on temporary, seasonal, and unreliable incomes—much in line, as we have seen, with other dispossessed geographies in the city.

Also like many of his neighbors, Ahmet was involved in a long and trying process of applying to the government for material compensation for losses incurred as a direct effect of counterinsurgency practices.[36] At the time of our conversation, he had been

[36] Compensation began with a number of high-profile cases before the European Court of Human Rights in the first few years after the events of the 1990s. ECHR operates on the principle that victims may apply if no laws for redress exist within their own national legal framework. In July of 2004, Turkey, both to close the breach in political and cultural intimacy (there were some 8000 cases before ECHR by 2004 (GÖÇ-DER 2009: 11)) and to exercise more control over the determination of compensation amounts, initiated its own national system for compensation under Law No. 5233. A number of non-governmental groups, both national and international, have voiced concerns about the means used for quantifying and

expecting a final settlement on his claim for two years, after a series of objections to the amount offered followed by re-inspections of the evidence of damage by state officials. "When is that money coming? We have no hope. One year? Two years? Never? It's up to the state". He was explicit about his wish to return, and had heard of reinvigorated attempts at village return. "We see it on TV, in the papers, but we don't know what they're doing…Let them inform us so that at least we can be prepared." But he had little hope of that project either, for a number of practical reasons often elided in the more optimistic press and politicians' statements on village return.

> Now apparently some village return project was prepared. But when they send us back to the village, under what conditions am I to live? I have in the village neither a home, a stable, animals, nor money in my pocket. When I go to the village, at the very least I'd need a tent so I could sleep there. But I don't have that chance…When citizens return, either a certain amount of credit should be given, or the state should support them for a couple of months such that when I load my wife and kids on the back of the truck, I have support until I can plow the fields and make a living from that.

His trajectory is in many ways similar to the people we met in the previous chapter. But also present in Ahmet's account was a further aspect that allows us to look more closely at the meaningful mediation of economic life after displacement and dispossession, and the modes and forms of politics emerging therefrom. It came across in a phrase he repeated throughout our encounter when he tried to restate the difference between life in the village and life in the city: "While in the village we would every day make breakfast of honey and butter, here we can't even see an olive".

The focus of this chapter is on nostalgic constructions of the countryside in the wake of the 1990s, and the uses, in discourses on the aftermath of displacement and dispossession, of signs of rural land and livelihoods as a means of morally and politically

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assessing losses, the amounts offered, the long delays and bureaucratic complications, and the questionable aims of some lawyers, among other matters.

evaluating the consequences of forced migration. Specifically, I am interested here in how signs of rurality (tomatoes, walnut trees), in their positive association with sustenance and fertility, are used in the narratives of migrants to not only paint the countryside as good, in contrast with an urban present overwhelmingly characterized as bad. The destruction of such positively valued signs, in the process of displacement and dispossession, also becomes part of the discursive practices by which state acts of counterinsurgency are evaluated as immoral; signs of soil and its fruits are part of the means by which people stake out a critical, oppositional stance to "the state" and to the state of affairs they find themselves in.

In other words, thinking through Agamben's conceptual vocabulary, but challenging his implication that the project of abandonment actually succeeds in stripping its subjects of their political life, through these everyday signs deeply associated with what is good in rural life, people take issue with the state's sovereign claim to use violence against its own citizens, and to then include them within its ken only to exclude them. Using tomatoes or soil as rhetorical stepping stones, people question the self-evidence of the condition they find themselves in, and suggest a sense of political belonging that does not recognize the state as the ultimate authority, but that rather has its allegiances with the ongoing project of Kurdish dissensus and oppositional political praxis. Rather than quashing the political "problem" of Kurdish dissent in Turkey, then, we again see that displacement has rather shifted its terrain and its terms. It is in trying to understand this process that I focus here on idyllic constructions of the countryside and the political appropriation of signs of food and soil.

Idyllic constructions of the countryside and food signs were not something I set out to research. Rather, these themes and images emerged unexpectedly from the research phase informing the previous chapter: interviews and less formal conversations and encounters with individuals and families with first-hand experience with the military-led evacuation and destruction of surrounding rural communities in the 1990s and the attendant forms of loss of life and livelihoods. This phase of research, as noted earlier, was primarily focused on eliciting accounts of migration and transformed livelihoods, but time and again, as I asked my standard questions about migration, work, rent, and the like, I found myself noting a number of unanticipated images and objects of memory: walnut and almond trees, implausibly fat tomatoes, pears like nectar, butter that some swear kept villagers alive well into their 100s, or tasty yogurt allegedly unmatched by anything one can find in the city.

Back in Cambridge and beginning to work through fieldwork data, I happened to mention the unexpected recurrence of these objects and images to an anthropologist visiting from another school. His reply caught me off guard: to paraphrase, well yes, often the people we anthropologists talk to tend to account for confounding life experiences through such primitive imagery. I was taken aback by the last phrase, not because I thought he was implying an evolutionist denial of coevalness that Fabian (1983) sees at work in stubborn and subtle ways in much anthropological thinking. Knowing his work, I am fairly sure he meant primitive in the sense of fundamental, elementary, or basic. Rather, my surprise was due to the fact that this was precisely the opposite point I was trying to make in the description of this material to him. For it struck me at the time of fieldwork, as it does now, that there is nothing elementary about

the ways in which the stuff of rural life is put to use in the narratives of forced migrants to tell complicated histories of migration, dispossession, transformed livelihoods, and urban impoverishment. The objects themselves, in their indexical association with the ordinary rural activities of eating, farming, and shepherding, are perhaps in some sense basic, but what they are tasked with, in the city's displaced, dispossessed neighborhoods, is something quite intricate. These objects are the stuff out of which people attempt to give meaning to an exceedingly messy sociopolitical history, and to ask a tomato to tell the history of loss and dispossession is no elementary task. Is there not analytical value, then, in not too hastily dismissing these ways of conceptualizing and narrating a confounding history as merely basic—for there is a "politics of significance" at play in labeling certain forms of stories as "mere" (Herzfeld 1997)—and to instead attending to the resonance of the stories of people who have lived—some as self-described guerrilla families, some as more or less sympathetic by-standers, some as self-described victims—through, to echo Roseberry (1989:59), a disordered past and into a present much the same? It is with this framework in mind that I examine this common genre of narrating household histories of declining livelihoods and the differences between rural and urban life by way of signs of the stuff of rural life and livelihoods, and explore the potential political work that these discourses might be carrying out.

But here, before proceeding to the ethnography, we need to pause to consider more clearly *how* discourse is used to morally persuade others of a certain politics of dispossession and displacement. Let us take the example of implausibly fat Lice tomatoes. Lice tomatoes are, like other products of the soil analyzed below, indexes in the semiotic sense in that they acquire their social meaning by virtue of spatial or

temporal contiguity to something, possibly also another sign (Peirce 1974, Mertz 2007). We shall see below that the signs for food in people's narratives are contiguous to the sign for Kurdish soil or earth—that from which one has been dispossessed—and as such are good to think with due to this logic of metonymic association. The unusual size of the tomato and its delicious taste or color are themselves qualisigns with iconic value, the presumption being that only foods of this kind or quality could be grown in such fertile soil. The metonymic or indexical association goes even deeper because these foods are part of the ensemble of foods that compose agricultural production in the region. But there is another aspect of significance at work, and one that gets us to the moral and political evaluation at work here, one hinted at in the previous chapter, but in need of fleshing out. There is a moral valence to the indexical and iconic system around foods. Food production is linked to the sustaining of life, something clearly suffused with positive moral valuation. This would seem to be a part of why the state's scorched earth policies are valued as doubly immoral by the people we will encounter. The use of food signs described here is not only because of people's agrarian backgrounds. Nor is it only because of an orientation to situational thinking that Ong (2002) locates in oral cultures: a predilection to think through immediate and familiar objects or situations rather than abstractions. It rather has to do with an association of agrarian livelihoods not only with innocence—a number of people I met underscored that they were "hurting no one" in their previous livelihoods—but morality: sustaining life, sustaining, even, the nation. The status of the southeast as breadbasket of the southeast, a center of fertile land feeding the country, was not lost on my interlocutors. The people I met in researching this and other chapters underscored this moral valence to make a political point. This chapter

tries to unpack the political significance of morally charged signs of rural life. We begin with a brief exploration of the valences of rural idyll.

## RURAL IDYLL

A number of analysts—critical geographers in particular—have noted the pervasiveness of idyllic constructions of the countryside, in both popular and academic understandings of rural life and across a variety of contexts (e.g. Valentine 1997, Little and Austin 1996). Specific to Kurdish history, politics, and culture, geographer Maria O'Shea has described the salience of nostalgic constructions of Kurdish rurality in both the academic literature on Kurds and in the myths and images by which many Kurds themselves articulate 'Kurdishness'. On the latter point, O'Shea writes:

> If any common thread of culture unites the disparate parts of Kurdistan, and forms a basis for both Kurdish identity and national mythology, it would appear to be the rural experience. Despite the inequalities and poverty inherent in Kurdish rural life, many Kurds idealize the rural idyll, in much the same way that the virtues of nomadic tribal life are extolled by many settled Arabs. [2004:136]

Rural idyll, she shows, is reflected in many of the signifying practices present across the Kurdish Middle East, from popular Kurdish music to children's names to the sorts of foods Kurds would identify as 'truly Kurdish'. Though O'Shea does not specify, in the following passage, precisely what part of the Kurdish Middle East her observations are based on, the general idea that idealized constructions of Kurdish rural life are carried out through food rings true in my experience:

> Those foods thought of as Kurdish tend to be those of the village—hearty soups, dairy products, and grain-based dishes. Many everyday food-related activities of village people are revered by Kurds, frequently practiced in homes in the urban setting and often exported to foreign lands as symbols of Kurdish identity. Examples include: the making of flat griddle bread…butter churning, providing both Kurdish butter and the national drink, buttermilk…yogurt and cheese making…All these foodstuffs, the fruits of subsistence farming, and their means of production, are considered to be somehow inherently Kurdish. They appear in

> proverbs and expressions, are often ostentatiously favored over richer fare, and are considered to be more delicious in Kurdistan than elsewhere. [2004: 137-8]

Similarly, the scholarly habits of representing Kurdishness that O'Shea and others identify as endemic to much of the published work on Kurds and Kurdish geographies also tend to focus on the rural at the cost of a more invested analysis of other aspects of Kurdish culture, society, and politics. As Dutch ethnographer Martin Van Bruinessen remarked, "cities appear to have been peripheral to the concerns of most Kurds as well as those who studied them" (1996).[37] Though this observation may not be as representative of the state of scholarship now as it was in the late 1990s, the general point holds; there is a strong association of Kurdishness, across different registers of discourse, with an idealized picture of rurality. Many of my interlocutors seemed to speak of their lives as suspended somewhere between country and city, and it was from this unstable point that they told stories of delicious clotted cream or soil that returned two or threefold on what one put in. In thinking through this last point, Raymond Williams's seminal work *The Country and the City* offers an important insight. Williams analyzes imaginative constructions of the countryside in the United Kingdom across centuries of urbanization and industrialization, and makes the dry observation that, no matter when we look, the blissful rural past seems always to have only just vanished (Williams 1975; Roseberry 1989: 57). This perhaps renders idyllic constructions of the countryside questionable as historical records, but that is not, for Williams, the point. What analysis instead has to account for are the uses of the past in the present.

[37] At least in the example of Kurdish Turkey, it seems clear that this tendency is rapidly changing, as more and more researchers from within Turkey and without are looking into the social and political lives of cities across the southeast and in Kurdish geographies in Turkey's migrant metropoles. For a brief sampling of the literature available to English readers, see Gambetti 2009; Öktem 2004; Özsoy 2010, 2013; Üstündağ 2005. Nükhet Sirman is also involved in ongoing research on Kurdish rural-urban migrants in Mersin.

Williams's felicitous line on the "well-known habit of using the past, the 'good old days', as a stick to beat the present" (Williams 1975:12) provides a point of departure for thinking through the uses of the past in the stories of older migrants in contemporary Diyarbakır that I will work through in the following pages. But what precise aspects of the present are being, as it were, beaten? And how is this generative of political stance? How are these forms of talk that extol the virtues of rural life and focus on workaday elements of rural life and livelihoods (fruits of the soil, products of animal husbandry, the soil itself) working to provide the ordinary stuff from which people articulate a critical stance to experiences of city living founded on acts of dispossession and marked by impoverishment, wage dependency, and economic precariousness? Let us now look, in ethnographic detail, at the work of moral valuation via food signs as an important everyday tool for the articulation, between material practice and its meaningful mediation, of a stance of objection, a politics of displacement and dispossession. We begin with the rhetorical life of land.

## RICH SOIL

One key image in idyllic constructions of the countryside is the fertility of soil. Diyarbakır, to remind the reader, is located in the northern stretch of a landscape that ancient Greeks called Mesopotamia, between rivers. The agricultural productivity of the landscape—the so-called Fertile Crescent—is famous, nationally and internationally. Discourse on the fertile, blessed nature of the soil (*bereketli toprak*) finds a way into a range of public representations of the region. A recent statement by the Democratic Society Congress (a group of politicians and intellectuals assembled to theorize the future

of Kurdish politics in Turkey) on the significance of economic reforms, if Turkey were to enact the vision of democratic autonomy they are calling for, begins with these words:

> To speak of the economy in these lands (*bu topraklarda*), in perhaps the first center of economic society, is exciting. Because these lands are depicted in all the holy books in terms of abundance, fertile geography, and heaven. This is a place that saw the emergence of the Neolithic village and the agricultural revolution, the cradle of Mesopotamian Civilization where the first societies began to live together and become self-sufficient. Unfortunately, today this heavenly geography has been transformed into a virtual hell in the grips of poverty and economic abandonment. As a result of colonization and intentional economic underdevelopment, with its hunger, joblessness, and destroyed nature, Kurdistan has become a virtually unlivable space, creating a wave of migration scattered in all directions. [DTK n.d.]

Local business interests also frequently reference the soil's fertility in promotional brochures, speeches, and interviews meant to entice investors to a geography where over 20 percent of the regional economy is in agriculture and animal husbandry and a significant percentage of local industry (matched only by textile production) has to do with the processing of agricultural products. Under the heading "Fertile places (*diyarlar*) that witnessed history", for instance, a promotional booklet prepared by the Diyarbakır-based Karacadağ Development Agency first describes Diyarbakır as "located in a place where civilization was born, agriculture was first carried out, and which is known as the Fertile Crescent due to the fertility of agricultural lands" (2010:5-6), before going on to list a series of facts meant to prove the region's deeply rooted history of agrarian abundance: the first known domesticated wheat was found just outside of the city; the first wild grapes were found in the same site, along with the first chickpeas; Diyarbakır was a major supplier of roses to the Ottoman Empire, and in the 1500s the province met Istanbul's needs for meat.

Many of my interlocutors, from long-settled shopkeepers to displaced newcomers,

invoked the image of fertile land and the history of productivity associated with it to ask, rhetorically: how is it possible to have such poverty and want in such a plentiful, productive ecology? People posed such questions not only in terms of the aboveground offerings of the land. What lies beneath the land was also the subject of similarly intended speculation. There is a great deal of rumor and conjecture in Diyarbakır (and indeed, in Turkey more generally) about great oil reserves said to lie just beyond the city, but that are closed to tapping, due to ill-defined external pressure. [38]

Images of the fertile soil of the region, in short, simply abound in the city, and across social categories; it would be difficult *not* to come across them. But although this imagery was sometimes explicitly linked to stories of outside meddling or potential investment opportunities, more often, in my fieldwork at least, such imagery was invoked to draw a contrast between past rural productivity and present urban privation. Thus a man in his late 40s or early 50s who saw his village outside of Kulp burned by the military, and who, in 2009, was working as a street vendor selling inexpensive belts and

[38] Concerned less with what grows above ground than what lies beneath, stories of the purported great underground mineral wealth in the southeast were extremely common in Diyarbakır. A widespread rumor in the city points to the extensive oil fields in nearby northern Iraq and the modest ones in nearby Batman and claims to have knowledge that far more oil reserves exist in the southeast, but that outside powers refuse to allow the fields to be tapped. My field notes record this exchange with a middle-aged tailor born in the city but with family roots in a nearby village, "Look, at a certain point, a line is drawn [the border with Iraq]. They draw a line, eh [he extends his finger and draws a line on my knee]. Now, how is it that on one side they are rich from resources, and on the other, nothing at all?" He left the question open. Sometimes the agent refusing to permit the rumored oil fields in the southeast to be exploited is Ankara (because, as the guesswork goes, it wants to keep the southeast poor and thus subservient), sometimes America, and sometimes an international oil company (typically Shell, probably because it operated a plant for years outside of Diyarbakır). And the accusation runs along similar lines as the general theory, also quite widespread in the southeast, that holds that eastern Turkey has been intentionally underdeveloped economically to serve a national interest in regional docility and dependence. Another vein of mineral stories maintains the same general thesis (that there is great potential in the region), but instead of being underused, it is said to be abused. Thus the copper mines just north of the city (in use since the late Ottoman period), the oil fields outside of Batman and just south of Diyarbakır (discovered in the 1940s), and the many hydroelectric stations built along the region's key waterways, the Tigris and Euphrates—all are cited as instances of resource extraction that enrich or benefit mainly those outside the region. Again, these and similar rumors have social purchase because they tap into the widespread perception that only political injustice and intentionally structured inequality can explain such poverty amidst natural abundance.

wallets, nail clippers, worry beads, and trinkets recalled this about his land and its productivity:

> Our land, *yani*, I'd taken a separate plot from my father's. *Vallahi*, our land, it was fertile. Maybe you won't believe it, but you'd put in one and get out three…Working in the fields used to be our thing, wheat, barley, green lentils, red lentils, and tobacco. Our onions, they were famous. Our vineyards were extensive; they had a start and no end! I used to make [fruit leather] and [fruit sausage, produced by boiling grape juice thickened with starch and repeatedly dipping a string of walnuts into the mixture, then letting it cool, then dipping it again to form another layer, and so on] and send it to Diyarbakır for sale. We had fruit trees, plums, apples, pears, apricots. *Yaw*, our village was lush, I mean, I wish we were there together now, you'd see what I mean.

If for him the relevant contrast was between past relative wealth and his present condition of economic marginality, another man in his 40s from a village outside of Lice contrasted the fertility of his land—which he encapsulated in the image of Lice's famous enormous tomatoes—with what seemed to him a laughably meager monetary compensation by the state for his losses. I listened to his stories in his living room one evening. As was customary for such house visits, the evening started with a long and graceful process of social warming up, during which his wife brought multiple pots of tea and prepared heaping plates of fruit and nuts, interspersed by cigarettes my interlocutor rolled from tobacco grown just outside his natal village outside of Lice. In this particular instance, the speaker was keen to show me a series of photographs he had taken with his cellular phone on a recent trip back to the now almost entirely deserted village. They were grainy, but showed him sitting before a small grill billowing smoke in an open field, and in the shade of a stand of trees. "True nature", he said, "open air, not all this *beton beton beton"*. Good for your lungs, too. In another photograph, he was cupping his hands and holding something red and large: a Lice tomato.

> Think of it, you apply for compensation for this land, and they give you 8,500 lira. That's not even enough to clear the ground. It's not enough for a truckload of sand, or 500 bags of cement, or whatever else you need to construct a house. But out of fear we couldn't object. They didn't compensate us for rent either.
>
> Our land sat fallow for years. There were 50-60 pine nut trees, 10 *dönüm* of grape vines, but they dried up at the root. My trees would yield five tractors of pomegranates, and the same for figs.
>
> But go there now and you'd say there's no life here. Everything dried up.[39] There were plum trees, pears, apples. You would get a sack of barley in exchange for a sack of pomegranates. The grapes, the apples, those we would bring to nearby treeless villages and sell them. We wouldn't bring them to the city. We were mountain villagers.
>
> If here you pay 30 a month for water, in the village, there's no such thing. And electric bills only came in [Prime Minister and President] Özal's time [the 1980s]. The well, the vegetables: all were ours.
>
> Here, like I said, the tomatoes are two lira for a kilo, and if you buy a kilo it's barely enough for a salad. A single Lice tomato was 1.5 kilos. Really! But you can't find them anymore.[40] They're just a myth now.

As evidenced in this exchange, stories about the soil's abundance often bled into reflections on food. The next section considers these ethnographic instantiations of rural idyll via food signs.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Home visits—some of which led to recorded interviews, and some of which resulted in long, open-ended exchanges, noted down as completely as possible—usually involved, as in the accounts relayed above, my typically male interlocutor's wife or

[39] The reader will remember very similar remarks, uttered by two other older displaced people I interviewed about village life, from the previous chapter.

[40] In fact, Lice tomatoes did occasionally appear in Diyarbakır's street markets. Their skin was striated and imperfect, their coloring was variegated, and they had the taste of an excellent summer tomato. I mentioned, during the exchange in question, that I had bought and eaten some of these tomatoes, but my interlocutor was certain that whatever I had tasted would have paled in comparison to what he was talking about.

daughter emerging from the kitchen with plates piled high with clementines, pears, or pomegranates. In winter months, there was also typically a stack of fruit leather or a bag of hazelnuts, almond, or walnuts—stock winter food in many villages, and said to keep the body warm in the cold months.

Beyond the pleasure and grace of these acts, noteworthy was the extent to which such mundane objects of consumption so often served as catalysts or prompts for recollections of rural life (for ethnographies of food as an especially rich site for the exploration of sensuous memory, see Sutton 2001, 2010; Holtzman 2006). What is more, fruits, nuts, and dairy products not only acted as rhetorical stepping stones for reflecting on past rural productivity, abundance, and a feeling of security and assurance of one's ability to get by, which was contrasted by ex-villagers, both implicitly and explicitly, with the aftermath of dispossession and urban impoverishment. They also provided a means for morally and politically evaluating displacement and dispossession. Thus an older couple talked about searching out a particular nut merchant in Diyarbakır who sold, alongside the fat, easy-on-the-eye walnuts imported from other cities or from overseas, sacks of smaller, deeply tannin-blackened walnuts grown in villages outside the town they hailed from. At certain times of the year, too, at certain heavily trafficked intersections men would sit next to a sack filled with walnuts or almonds and with a small cardboard sign on the sidewalk in front of the sack advertising the origins of the nuts. Field notes also record an instance when an older man was showing me how to roll up walnuts in fruit leather, making a *dürüm* of sorts, when suddenly halfway through eating, he put it down and, with a theatrical look of disgust, insisted that "Turkish" walnuts[41] had

[41] This instance of 'ethnicizing' consumables brings to mind discourses on "Turkish tea" (a rather mild black tea grown along the eastern coast of the Black Sea that is the standard across most of Turkey) versus

no taste and were nothing like the yield of the trees "they burned". The taste of the walnuts thus activates an association in which not just memory or longing are at stake, but a political condemnation of the state for its scorched earth policies. The reason why tomatoes or walnuts work so well for this is their indexical association with the sign of a landscape over-endowed with signs of fertility and the sustenance of life. The acts of the state (namely, destroying walnut groves) become not only unjust, but immoral.

The use of mundane rural objects as semiotic tools for political and moral condemnation also extended beyond fruit and nuts to other objects of rural life. In a visit to a house on the far outskirts of town, to a family that was receiving animal husbandry-targeted microcredit loans from the Bangladeshi Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank—Diyarbakır was the test pilot for the Grameen Bank's extension of its controversial microcredit program to Turkey—a bowl of slightly sour homemade yogurt with a thick layer of *kaymak* (the semi-solid skin of milk fat that forms on the top), glasses of yogurt watered down to a drinkable consistency and salted (what O'Shea above called, more or less accurately, buttermilk), and a small bowl of honey from my interlocutors' natal village were placed on the floor before us as we chatted. We began dipping some leftover market-bought flatbread[42] into the yogurt. The elder male of the household, who was explaining the inadequacy of the few animals they had for making a living in comparison to his large flocks in the village, repeatedly called my attention to

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the local preference for Ceylon tea, imported (and often smuggled) across the Syrian border. Dislike for Turkish tea gets worked into daily life in interesting ways, in popular humor (see Güzel 1997), in ways of politely (or sometimes not so politely) chiding the proprietors of teahouses, and in mundane expressions of Kurdish nationalism.

[42] The kind of bread typical in western Turkish metropolises, *somun ekmeği* or simply *ekmek*, which closely resembles what in the United States would be called Italian bread, while not impossible to come by in Diyarbakır, was far less common than the standard *nan*/*pide*. The latter, meanwhile, is relatively rare in western Turkish cities such as Ankara or Istanbul, except during Ramadan, when bakeries begin to produce a close version under the name of *Ramazan pidesi*.

the taste of the yogurt and the honey. My field notes record his repeated use of *hakiki*—as in, this is the real stuff, how it should taste, and how it tasted in the village. He refused to eat store-bought yogurt in the city, he said, and insisted it was unhealthy, whereas 'authentic' rural animal products are health-giving, the evidence for which he saw in men in his village who purportedly lived well into their early 100s because they ate so much butter and kaymak. His positive valuation of rural products, in contrast to the negative, ostensibly inauthentic nature of city commodities, continued after the snack, when he produced a small tin of tobacco and, rolling a cigarette, noted that the tobacco, which was from a village not far from his own, not only tasted like it should when it comes from Lice growers, but was less harmful than pre-rolled cigarettes.

Nor is this habit limited to the agrarian products of place. In writing up this material I had the chance to return to Diyarbakır a number of times, and on one trip, my research assistant and I tried, without success, to count how many times we had heard some variation on the phrase, "even the rocks there were better than here"—that is, even the lowliest, simplest object there is preferable to anything in our lives now. In one instance drawn from field notes of a passing chat with a woman feeding her cow—we were on the way to interview one of the men whose words I relayed above—my assistant asked the woman what she called the cow. Without hesitation and with a wry smile, she replied "Tayyip" (the name of the standing Turkish Prime Minister). She asked us what we were doing in her part of town with our notebooks in hand, and we explained that we were meeting a couple of families to talk about the process of being forced to leave the village and rebuild a livelihood in the city. Why did we not think to talk to her, she asked. Her family had come to this particular stretch of land south of Diyarbakır on the

Bismil plain to plant tobacco—work the family knew well, having lived in a tobacco-producing village outside of Kulp. Within a few years, however, a national quota system was put in place that drastically limited how much a single household could sell to the state buyer per year, slashing household incomes and once again eliminating the livelihoods of the many already-once-dispossessed families trying to get by on these fields. She said that she especially missed the cold springs, and that when they return to the village for religious holidays and family grave visits she fills up a few plastic water bottles to bring the spring water back. From the mention of water, the conversation took a morose turn:

> Sometimes we go back to the village, to visit, for a wedding, for a funeral, and we can't take it. That cold water, our trees, our fields, our animals…Even the rocks there were better than [anything] here. They took it all from us, when we see it we want to die…Now we're all dispersed, some to prison, some to the graveyard, some are just scattered everywhere. What I want is to come together again, but that will only happen in the graveyard…Your land is lovely, it's the place you're born, [but] if this is how the world is, I don't want to see it. I want to die, but I can't die. I can't forget any single thing that I lived. Our pain is the same, our problem is the same. It got into us and it just won't get out.

Here again, it is spring water, trees, and fields—products of the land—doing more than acting as triggers for memory or desire for another time and place. It is the moral valence of these signs that underscore the speaker's political condemnation of state acts, past and present, that both led to her displacement and dispossession, and caused her ongoing urban impoverishment. Here is a politics at work, one carried out through an art of convincing, and aided by signs of rurality deeply imbued with moral value.

In its general features, this blending of memory, the stuff of rural lives and livelihoods, and place is not wholly unique to Diyarbakır, to Kurdish Turkey, or to Turkey more generally. In the example of food, anthropologists are familiar with the meaningful associations of food and place at work in, for instance, French notions of

*terroir* and its legal-agri-cultural twin concept *appellation d'origine contrôlée*. Less institutionalized forms of public culture surrounding food across Turkey, too, are suffused by talk about agricultural products as indexical of place and particularity. One of the stock questions asked in Turkey to someone from a place one is unfamiliar with is, "*oranın nesi meşhur*?" or what's famous there?, a question that almost without exception refers to agricultural products. Public monuments, public squares, statues, bridges, and official stationery in cities and towns across Turkey are adorned with agricultural goods that stand in as indexes of place: the giant statue of a fig in Aydın or a carrot in Beypazarı, the ubiquitous watermelon imagery in Diyarbakır, images of apricots in Malatya, or statues of clusters of grapes in the seemingly unending vineyards inland from İzmir in the Gediz Plain. At a less monumental scale, street markets across Turkey are filled, in the appropriate season, with shouts of the names of certain place-food associations: Afyon potatoes, Bursa peaches, Ayaş tomatoes[43]—the list is long.

One possible interpretation of this Turkish version of *terroir* is that these strategies are part of the semiotics of nation making. Like most nation states, Turkey inherited an internally diverse territory that was, furthermore, overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. Agricultural products can be seen to have provided a suitably familiar and workaday means for articulating how places belong to the national whole; indeed, knowledge of these food-place associations is part of the national curriculum. In a way perhaps broadly analogous to Benedict Anderson's idea on the political function of newspapers (1983), food, too, may provide an everyday object for imagining one as

[43] While living in Ankara at the end of this writing process, it was reported in a number of news sources that the mayor of the town of Ayaş not far from Ankara had commissioned a sculptor to carve a statue of a giant tomato, to be placed at the entrance of the city. Presumably this will replace the small one there now.

connected to others across a vast territory. But clearly there is something else at work in the use of food (as well as other indexes, such as soil or rocks) within the political history of the southeast. That migration can effect a redoubling of the semiotic potency of foods (as catalysts of memory, as triggers for comparing here and there, now and then) and other quotidian objects, and enlist them in articulating claims to locality, is widely observable in any large city in the world touched by migration. But what particular forms of political work are being done by the stories relayed above, given the particular conditions of forced migration and the violence and loss surrounding the means by which many of the people in these pages arrived in Diyarbakır?

At stake in idyllic constructions of the countryside in Diyarbakır is not an undirected or habitual form of rural nostalgia. Rather, people were using *ayran* and walnut trees to express their grievances at the perceived injustice of being forcibly removed from viable rural livelihoods and left to reconstruct life and livelihood in an urban political economy of dispossession followed by wageless life. Their invocation of the rural past, in other words, was not only—not even primarily—about the past. Denouncing the taste of yogurt in the city or playing up the delectableness and health-giving properties of the onions in one's village is a way of taking a stance to the state of affairs that the displaced and dispossessed find themselves thrown into, and doing so through morally charged signs.

That the city's displaced and dispossessed would have objections to being uprooted and facing impoverishment and economic precariousness in the city is clear enough. But to appreciate some of the specific reasons and objections, it may be useful to return to the interviews and field notes informing this and the previous chapter and to

attend to those passages where people touch more explicitly on themes of perceived injustices of this period and its aftermath. Consider this rather long account from a man in his mid-thirties, relatively young at the time of migration from his natal village outside of Lice. Today he is underemployed, and gets by on a combination of seasonal construction work and selling fruit from a pushcart.

> It was the end of 1992. Conflict broke out in the village. Many soldiers died. At the time my older brother was with our animals in the mountains. Evening came on. We waited. He didn't come. Then the soldiers came to the village with dead bodies and they said, "Do you know these terrorists?" I took one look and wished I hadn't. It was my brother. He had two kids. We dealt with the farming and he looked after the animals. Yes, he was partial to the cause, but there was neither a gun in his hand nor anything else. They killed him. But then they said he was killed in a terrorist struggle.
>
> We opened a court case at the European Court of Human Rights. [And their decision was that] the price of my brother's being reduced to pieces was 40,000 lira. How can I explain?
>
> Later they started to burn the village. On that same day, there was a big military operation on the [PKK] camps in the [nearby] mountains. See, our village was a verdant village. Just beyond our mountain there were guerilla camps. Nowadays if you go, they are still are there, but in ruins. Still, their cooking and sleeping and gathering places are apparent.
>
> Anyhow, a big conflict happened, three days and three nights. And they were attacking us, too. They started to burn houses, with flamethrowers. I'll never forget, one dishonorable solider, while burning houses he was looking at us and laughing. He was naked from the waist up. Can there be such a creature? I'm a villager. I've seen many animals in my life, but I've never seen such an animal. They were throwing grenades into houses. There was an auntie, she was quite old. When the soldiers burned her house, she threw a stone—she was right—at a soldier. He started to bleed. They started striking her with the butts of their rifles. We too then attacked the soldiers; we challenged them. But is your power enough? They've got guns, this guy is the state. The auntie died two months later.
>
> They took us to the road to Lice and drove us out, hitting and striking. We villagers said, 'Let's go to Lice'. A bus came, some of us got on, and we said, 'take us to Lice'. The driver said, 'Lice's no different from here'. We said, 'where shall we go?' In the end, we came to Diyarbakır. Everyone tried to find a

> relative's house. We were all scattered. I had an uncle, an animal trader, we stayed with him for two months or more.
>
> *Yaw*, we came, okay, and the state had killed my brother, and may Allah damn it, damn its people, its flag, its everything. And it was like I was naked. I couldn't walk, I couldn't look ahead of me. When I ate, it was like I was chewing grass. But the short of it was, we had no choice but to adjust. But it wasn't one month that the youngest of the house, my 17-year-old brother, took to the mountains [i.e. joined the PKK]. That's all we needed, you know? At that point I had one kid, but I said, by Allah, if it weren't for this child I too would have gone, and for that reason I wasn't at all angry with my brother. May Allah be with him and protect his companions.
>
> To support our house I worked as a porter in the produce wholesale market, and I worked in Hevsel gardens [a stretch of millennia-old agricultural fields bordering the old city center of Diyarbakır, on the banks of the Tigris River]. Later, I went to Adana, Giresun, Sakarya [all provinces far from Diyarbakır, and centers of seasonal, migrant, off-the-books agricultural labor], to pick hazelnuts and cotton. But it's wrong. I mean, they take you out of your village, and you go and do *hamallık* [lit. portership, more generally, lowly jobs] in the homeland of those who evicted you.
>
> Look, by this Quran on my wall I swear, may I be struck down if I lie when I say that I would cancel my children's schooling, take them by the hand, and return to the village if it were possible. A person leaves the soil where he is born only if he is without honor or if he can't live there. But it wasn't that we came [willingly]. They chased us out.

At a general level, his narrative highlights the creative conflation of political histories of violence with subsequent experiences of work. Unwilling or unable to forget the powerful incidents that marked his passage from rural viability to urban precariousness, past perceived injustices bleed into those of present livelihood practices, in a seemingly singular continuum of injury. Such is the experiential backdrop against which idyllic countryside should be interpreted. The normalization of violence in the 1990s—violent home evictions, rural property destruction, disappearances, torture, and public executions—is hard to fathom, as much for readers from Ankara or Istanbul as from Cambridge. The counterinsurgency practices pursued in that turbulent decade have rendered such experiences a taken-for-granted part of life in the contemporary social

truths of Diyarbakır, as in other nearby cities. Though I never expressly sought them out, stories of such experiences were an unavoidable part of this research. Consider one more account, this one from a single mother—her husband died under unclear circumstances while a political prisoner—who described her rough passage from country to city:

> We came to Diyarbakır in 1993. From [a village outside of Lice]. We used to see to our getting by with animal husbandry and farming. We didn't have any problems. We did pretty well in fact. Four children and us: our situation was quite good. We didn't have many expenses. Our pleasure, our economy, our financial situation, our spending of time: all were in place. We had animals, cows and sheep, and our land was irrigated. We would plant wheat, barley, lentils, and a small amount of tobacco. [But coming to Diyarbakır] we had to travel around a lot at first; we experienced many difficulties. Life was merciless. Then in 1993 I lost my husband. We started to live with my mother- and father-in-law. I had to look after my children. I am still working day and night. The rent, the children's school, I'm both mother and father. It's hard, but this is reality.
>
> I'm working now as a cleaner in a private hospital. I take minimum wage. I'm insured, but my children can't benefit from it because I am not legally shown as married [i.e. the marriage was a religious ceremony, not a state-recognized one, meaning that she remains, after her husband's death, illegible to formal bureaucratic systems of marriage registration whereby certain state benefits are calculated], but we had my children registered under my husband's younger brother. Because they appear as his children, my children have no problem there.
>
> Until recently I've never taken any assistance. But this Ramadan, the municipality was giving assistance packets. How long it will last, I don't know. And I'm critical of them on this subject. Nobody looked after us. My house is a rental after all. My pay doesn't stay in my hand. The rent is 260, then there's 100 for the electricity, and then comes the water bill.
>
> Who doesn't miss their land? But it's not possible to return. No one is left in the village. It was completely evacuated. While leaving—actually, while being removed—from the village we had to leave very mercilessly. It was the spring of 1992. A [military] operation was carried out on the village. Everyone in the village was collected in front of the mosque. Our home was burned first. Already for three days and three nights tanks and artillery were raining down on us. After that we came to Diyarbakır, and we stayed with a relative for three months, then we returned to the village, or that is, we settled in shacks in Lice. My child was three months old. After a few months had passed we then returned to our village. In 1993, they again gathered everyone, set fire to things, and insulted us. 'You returned to help the terrorists.' Because no solution was left, because Lice too was burned, necessarily we came to Diyarbakır. It was after that that it happened to us [the death of her husband].

> Villages were being burned daily at that time. In 2000 a very small number of people returned to our village, they set up tents. Again the soldiers destroyed them not once but twice. After 2001, [the soldiers] didn't mess with them. We haven't gone for eight years. It's rumored that a military headquarter has been established there.
>
> I will never forget this: They were burning our home before our eyes. My daughter was then three years old, and her slippers were burning. She said to me in Kurdish, 'Mother, my slippers are burning.' The soldier at the same time was saying, 'What did she say? What's she saying?' At that moment my husband went inside, and it was full of smoke and fire. My mother-in-law said, "My son's burning, my son!" She started to cry out, 'You burned our house and hearth!' Then she said to the commander, 'What did we do? You burned and destroyed everything of ours. What are we to do now? Any solution for us?' The commander taunted, 'Your son [an alleged PKK member] will find a solution.'
>
> My husband and I came to Diyarbakır without shoes on our feet. That day, four children from the village died because of artillery fire and helicopter bombing. How can we forget the weeping, the cries, the shrieks and wails? The soldiers said 'Don't leave any live animals behind', so we tried to save them. We tried but it didn't happen. My chickens burned alive. I said 'Don't burn my home', and they took my by the arms and the hair and dragged me. The house burned very quickly. Then they collected us at the head of the road and put a soldier in charge of us. Then they burned the remaining homes. We also had a tape player hanging on the wall. That really got me. They reduced to shreds my [various banned Kurdish musicians'] tapes, everything.
>
> Would that everything were like goods and property. Some things can't be brought back again.

Again, it is in the context of such life and livelihood histories that idyllic constructions of rural life should be interpreted. Local walnuts contrasted with supposedly tasteless imported ones not only provide a means of talking about what it beautiful and positive in rural life versus what is unsavory and negative in urban life. They are part of the meaning toolbox, the thinking equipment, by which many displaced families deploy morally charged signs of rurality to underscore the perceived injustice and injury behind their displacement and dispossession and their relocation to urban economies defined by joblessness and livelihood precariousness. As outlined in the previous chapter, the point is not whether these accounts are entirely factual, but what other modes of factuality they

are trying to accomplish by explaining the loss of livelihood through charged everyday objects.

At stake, then, is not simply nostalgic longing, but a politics of objection, a stance of dissensus. Diyarbakır is frequently described in Turkey as a 'political' city. Criticizing Ankara for its perceived past and present wrongs, discussing the latest speech of prominent political figures in the various faces of Kurdish politics, recalling various transitions in leftist politics in Turkey's history, invoking popular contemporary terms such as cultural rights, linguistic rights or popular themes such as gender equality: these and similar subjects circulate freely and often in Diyarbakır's coffeehouses, small shops, and other public spaces of congregation. That the prevalence of such subjects is further perceived as quite ordinary, unremarkable, and taken-for-granted by most residents—to a degree that newcomers or outsiders familiar with other Turkish cities are often surprised by—is, at least in part, what gives Diyarbakır this reputation. Yet alongside talk about the practices of political parties or invocations of the keywords common to the language of contemporary Kurdish politics, there is another sense in which one can talk about politics carried out within or by everyday language. Politics can, recalling our discussion of Jacques Ranciere's work (2010), also be thought of as something distinct from the language and practices of political parties or government. Instead, one can think of politics as instances wherein the intelligibility of a particular social and economic arrangement is thrown into question, and an active process of interrogating the logic and reasons for things as they are becomes a widespread part of everyday life. In southeastern Turkey, the profound transformations to life and livelihood brought about by displacement and dispossession have not only led to widespread conditions of economic

precariousness that broadly echo Denning's work under the concept of wageless life. It has led to widespread public acts of taking issue with this history, to the flourishing of talk about perceived past and present political and economic injustice, the debts and obligations of the state to its citizens, and more. And this political history matters for how people mediate economic life. The events of the 1990s are widely perceived as injustices committed by the state, and this perception filters into everyday anecdotes and jokes likening this history to robbery: to an act of property changing hands in a way considered immoral and unsanctioned. Consider one such joke[44] that circulated in the buildup to the 2009 elections about a rural landlord robbed of his clothes in the bath house only to be put in the ridiculous position of standing naked and trying to prove the act of theft.

> There was once a rural landlord who went to the public baths in Diyarbakır. He was washed and dried and went to make his way back home. But on the way out, he found his shoes missing. He went to the bathhouse owner to ask who might be held accountable (*hesap sormak*). 'Impossible! Such things don't happen here!' The landlord tried to make his case, but the owner would not hear him out.
>
> Sometime later, it again came time for the landlord to have his bath. Again he was washed and dried, and went to make his way back home. But on the way out, this time he found his shirt missing. Again he went to ask who was accountable and again the owner would not hear him out. 'A real troublemaker, this one! A real complainer! '
>
> Again sometime later, it came time for him to go the baths. Again he was washed and dried, and went to make his way back home. This time, he reached for his things and found every last piece of clothing gone. Again he went to hold the bathhouse accountable, and again they would not hear him out. It was all too

[44] Diyarbakır is renowned, regionally at least, for a public culture marked by wry political wit, and any portrait of the city is incomplete without at least some recognition of the social role of lightness as a response to political impasses and everyday troubles. A friend working in the cultural wing of local government, for instance, once sat in on the screening of a film about torture and detention in Diyarbakır's notorious prison. The main criticism that she and her friends had of the film was that it was too heavy-handed, and captured nothing of the constant banter and humor of, at times, the blackest sort by which people made an already unbearable situation just a bit lighter. Doğan Güzel's comic strip series *Qırıx* (1997) is a fine example of the city's advanced political humor.

> much. Standing there naked, he cried, 'For God's sake, I don't mean to complain, but do you think this is how I arrived? (*bele mi geldim*[45])?'

Or consider an analogy relayed to me by a shopkeeper I interviewed many times and met regularly for small talk across most of my two years in the city. This exchange took place, again, in the run-up to the 2009 elections, when the nationally ruling AK Party aspired, in the words of party leader Tayyip Erdoğan, to "take Diyarbakır" from the rule of the legal Kurdish party, and to this end had upped its distribution of public assistance (in the form of food, heating assistance, cash payments, and even white goods) to impoverished geographies across the city and the southeast. We were sitting in his shop, surrounded by walls stacked to the ceiling with shiny packs of cookies, snack cakes, sugary drinks, and smuggled cigarettes when, in response to my question about what he made of the influx of assistance into his neighborhood—which was literally built by the displaced and dispossessed—he gestured to the walls of the shop and asked me to imagine that someone had come and robbed his shop of all the goods on its shelves, leaving the family in dire straits. Then, he said, imagine that sometime later, the same agent who deprived the family returned offering to help them out by giving them the same goods, which they needed to make a living, only they called it an act of beneficence. "Now what would do in such a situation", he asked rhetorically, hinting to the fact that many people across the southeast rejected this aid on the principle of

[45] Part of the punch line's magic was its use of the Diyarbakır dialect of Turkish, which is closer in many ways to Baku than Istanbul. Thus *böyle* (in this way) becomes *bele*, as *öyle* (in that way) becomes *ele*. Also, the context of this joke is no doubt important. It was said by a prominent local politician in an introduction to a presentation that tried to make the case for seeing state policies as responsible for the production of poverty in eastern and southeastern Turkey. For a published study based on this political initiative within the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, see Sönmez 2008. This was about not just robbery, but about playing on the sense of absurdity in finding the burden of proof laid on those who feel they have had their means of living unjustly taken from them, and who have encountered many practical obstacles in their search to hold someone or something accountable (in applying for compensation, within the framework of Law No. 5233, for example) for their losses.

refusing the seeming charity of one assumed to be the agent of injury.[46] The lesson from these anecdotes is this: the fact that displacement and dispossession and the forms of impoverished urbanization they brought about happened by force, as part of a deliberate governmental strategy, has injected into popular ways of conceptualizing and talking about livelihoods a strong discourse of justice, blame, and accountability.[47] Contemporary economic life, in other words, is shot through with political questions about who caused widespread destabilized livelihoods, unemployment and impoverishment, as well as what should be done, and by whom, to address these matters. Enmeshed in economic life and its concepts is the turbulent political history of the last two to three decades and the dilemmas and unanswered questions, among a large part of the city, regarding the present conjuncture.

What I have tried to illustrate in this chapter are some of the ways in which political sensibilities and stances towards the state are staked out not only with reference to Ankara or Imralı, but also through matters seemingly as unrelated to politics as huge tomatoes and abundant walnuts groves. The processes of displacement and dispossession followed by urban precariousness have forced upon people an awareness of a disquieting reality that Marx detected at the heart of capitalism's particular calculus of labor's

[46] There are a few things going on in this story. Here, the instance is used simply to illustrate the currency of this sense of having been unjustly deprived—robbed—of a livelihood. That said, there are a few anecdotes that help to illustrate the relevance of the shopkeeper's rhetorical question. There were news stories that ran around election time of a group of women in the nearby city of Batman who forcefully ran AKP welfare agents out of their building. In another, a few of the foot soldiers of a microcredit program in Diyarbakır that was initiated by an AK Party MP (but that maintained it was a non-partisan, apolitical venture), young women who were tasked with going door to door to collect the weekly payments of the credit recipients, recalled being met at the door of one house by a man with a hunting rifle in hand who insisted they leave, that first the AK Party should show it was willing to end the war and only then would he accept "their help". The young woman in question relayed this last story to me with a sense of frustration at what she saw as the misguided, misinformed opinion of under-educated peasant newcomers. But one should not be so sure that the widespread popular perception of microcredit as an AK Party project is inaccurate.

[47] For a stimulating social-theoretical consideration of the social life of blame, see Tilly (2008).

necessity. "It is already contained in the concept of the free *labourer*", he wrote, "that he is a *pauper*: a virtual pauper . . . If the capitalist has no use for his surplus labour, then the worker may not perform his necessary labour" (1973:604). Michael Denning has imaginatively interpreted this passage as Marx's "account of bare life: since the exchange required for the means of living—the selling of labour-power—is accidental and indifferent to their organic presence, the worker is a virtual pauper" (2010:91). The people I spoke with in Diyarbakır in researching this and the previous chapter, whose lives and livelihoods were transformed by displacement and dispossession, understood quite clearly that the system of market dependency into which they were thrown by the events of the 1990s is largely indifferent to their ability to make a living by selling their work for wages. This fact of indifference is not only existentially unsettling. It also throws a wrench into one of the more familiar theoretical frameworks for thinking about dispossessed labor, captured in the image of a reserve army of labor: a mass of underemployed or unemployed, wage-dependent workers who function to drive down wages and weaken the bargaining power of organized labor. While there are certainly geographies of labor in Turkey where dispossessed and proletarianized Kurds are being actively exploited in this way, such a framework for accounting for the aftermath of economic dispossession, whatever the appeal of its functional simplicity, only clarifies one possible trajectory. Again, Denning: "under capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited" (2012:74). It is precisely this condition of forced wage dependency in the absence of reliable wage work—being under-exploited—that the men and women I spoke with for this research spent so much time talking about and interpreting. And it is precisely this constant discursive activity that gives dispossession

an idiomatic significance in Diyarbakır, where this recent history is re-inscribed through ordinary objects of rural life, from soil to the breakfast table, and given deep moral and political significance.

# CHAPTER 4
# BUILDING A FUTURE I: THE SONS OF MIGRATION AND WORKING LIFE AFTER DISPOSSESSION

> Like I said, I've got to see to my own future. I mean, look at youngsters like us. School? Only so far. Then some go elsewhere to Istanbul or Ankara and work as waiters or construction workers or day laborers. Or they stay and take over their father's business, or work for their older brothers. Like this or like that, they get by. But none have a regular life.
> —Young man, 19, working in his older brother's kebab stand, Interview, Winter 2008

## WORK HISTORIES, WORK FUTURES

The previous two chapters drew on oral accounts of the sociopolitical aftermath of displacement and dispossession from people old enough to have come of working age in the village before displacement in the early 1990s. Assembling the chapters involved working through fieldwork data on land and livelihoods lost, flocks sold at great losses, bride wealth gold sold, debts taken from jewelry shops, kin, or (as a last resort) loan sharks (*tefeci*), and tabs at the neighborhood corner store. The aim was to draw from this material a way of telling the history and current aftermath of displacement, dispossession, and urban impoverishment that is attuned to the interplay of livelihoods and symbolic practice, and to the ways in which talk about livelihoods might be understood as an act of political stance-taking, of dissensus.

At a general level, the object of inquiry in this and the following chapter is roughly the same: the incomplete efforts of people who came to the city in the 1990s to rebuild life and livelihood, the meaningful mediation of this process, and the potential political implications of this mediation. What distinguishes these chapters from the previous ones is their focus on young men from forced-migrant families. With only one exception, all the young men whom we shall encounter below were born in the village

and spent their first half-dozen or so years there. All carry some memories (however colored by the constant retellings of family members and friends, which, in any event, would seem to be true for older relatives, too) of the violent processes by which their families were compelled to leave the countryside for the city. Yet, in contrast to their elders (whose narratives in the previous chapter tended to dwell on, and draw a politics from, rural life and livelihood), the young men I interviewed and spent time with on-the-job for these chapters tended to be preoccupied with the future, and with the question of building a viable life and livelihood. Temporality thus matters here, too, and in ways similar to the previous chapters: a surfeit of free time for those without work, a constant running from here to there, a lack of time, for those juggling the demands of work and school. Yet again, in this and the following chapter, we will see that these pressures of time do not constitute a stripping bare of political life. Here too, in other words, the concern is with political stance taking as emerging from the interplay of everyday livelihood-related acts and their meaningful mediation. Here, though, 'livelihood-related acts' will have to stretch to include education, which in this context becomes fetishized as a 'way out' of livelihood insecurity, even, we shall see, as it is perceived as both an instrument of Turkish nationalism and an example of state neglect.

One note before we explore a number of theoretical points about youth and its political framing. The reader may wonder why there are no female voices in this and the next chapter. After all, women were displaced and dispossessed as well, and the variety of forms of labor (seasonal agricultural labor, unpaid domestic labor, informal work) they engage in is crucial to the viability of displaced households. Is the absence of women an artifact of being a male in the field? In a sense, yes. A number of these interviews grew

out of many long hours spent sitting in chairs outside of corner stores, bakeries, or neighborhood restaurants run by young men I knew, whose friends would come by throughout the night, leading to conversations that often ran into the early hours of the morning. The time required to develop these relationships would have been a significant challenge with young women. I did enlist the help of a friend to carry out interviews with a few young women, but these did not lead to the same long, open-ended, casual exchanges that I was able to have with young men. As to the challenge that in focusing on men's labor I am reproducing a patriarchal logic, I can only say that I try not to present men's experience as universal, nor do I discount the labor of women in displaced livelihoods, even if their voices do not figure into this ethnographic work. With these caveats, I move to a series of general remarks on youth and its political framings.

## YOUTH AND YOUTHFULNESS

In a recent essay on youth and political life in the urban Middle East, Asef Bayat distinguishes youthfulness from the simple biological fact of being young. Youthfulness is, in his conceptual vocabulary, a socially defined space between "the period of vulnerability and dependence of childhood… [and] adulthood, the world of work, parenting, and responsibility" (Bayat 2010: 118)—a space that, as generations of anthropologists have noted (see Bucholtz 2002 for a review of the anthropology of youth), is highly plastic across time and space. Bayat describes, for instance, that in his natal village in Iran, the transition between the social worlds of childhood and adulthood was fairly swift, whereas in his fieldwork in Tehran and Cairo, he observed an elongation of this transitional period, and an opening of space for the elaboration of a set of

"dispositions…ways of being, feeling, and carrying oneself" that Bayat gathers under the concept of youthfulness (2010: 118). The concept of youth, this suggests, is best approached as always socially embedded, always a vessel whose referential content is filled up differently in various historical and cultural contexts.[48]

In thinking through this ethnographic material on young men in Diyarbakır and their concerns with, as the restaurant worker above said, seeing to their futures, Bayat's approach is both helpful and problematic. On the one hand, the lack of jobs has done here what it has in countless other broadly similar contexts: pushed back the age of finding a stable job, getting married, and establishing a household independent of one's parents—all the commonly identified accouterments of male adulthood. On the other hand, others features of youthfulness identified by Bayat—"freedom from responsibility for others", for instance—are less relevant in migrant households, where often it is the labor of the sons of migration, and often starting from a fairly young age, that is crucial to the economic viability of the household in its new urban setting. For many of the young men whose practices of labor and labor preparation (schooling, vocational training, and trying to come up with schemes for making a living) form the ethnographic basis for this chapter, the transition between childhood and working life was a swift one. A clear statement to this effect came in an interview with a young man who had seen his village burn when he was around six years old, and who had started working within a few years of coming to Diyarbakır, doing all the standard jobs of child informal labor—selling gum, packets of tissues, ice cream, and *simit*, shining shoes, working in coffeehouses and restaurants, and most recently working nights in a bakery. After he listed off the various

[48] See Durham (2000) for an attempt to apply the linguistic-anthropological concept of shifters to describe the cultural and historical contingency of 'youth'.

jobs he had done, I commented that he had started working while still a child, which he at first passed over with a nod, but then quickly corrected me. "Not while a child. When we were children, our childhood—I mean, without living our childhood, when we looked at others, they lived their childhood. Of course we wanted to do that too, but…when you start working at eight or nine, without living childhood you directly pass to a young man." This is not to say that taking on responsibilities as key income earners in dispossessed, impoverished households at a young age necessarily negates all other aspects of youthfulness—for instance, most of the young men I met cared tremendously for their dress and personal appearance, and enjoyed leisurely, boisterous strolls down the city's main thoroughfares or in its malls. But the sociopolitical context of forced displacement and economic dispossession, and the obligations these events have tended to place on young men, I will argue, have uniquely qualified the experience of youthfulness in contemporary Diyarbakır.

Qualified how? What seems particular about the forms of youth explored here is the fact that, as we noted earlier, many Diyarbakırite newcomers, young and old, perceive their current economic situation as rooted not in fate or the vagaries of an abstract market, but in specific, deliberate practices of the state—processes that, as we have seen, rendered rural livelihoods unviable for thousands of small farmers and shepherds. Many also share the widespread idea that the limited labor markets of regional cities, where many of the displaced and dispossessed and their children ended up, are the product of a history of intentional underdevelopment. This introduces a politicized reading of economic life that has struck me across my research in the city as rather unique in its spread. In traveling and doing research in other parts of Turkey, it has been my

experience that people unfamiliar with Diyarbakır—and, as people in Turkey, in my experience at least, freely admit, few without family in the region or reasons of work have been to the east of Turkey, though this, as Ayşe Öncü (2011) has pointed out in an engaging article on a resurgence of representations of the east in television and tour packages in the early 2000s, may be changing—struggle to imagine the extent to which critical discourses about inequality and injustice, state violence and the perceived misuse of state authority enter into ordinary conversations of all subjects. These matters frame the favored cluster of topics in the conversational life of the city, unemployment, underemployment, and the conditions of whatever work is available, which were also central to the concerns and conversations of the young men we shall encounter in this chapter. Before we get to these conversations, however, we need to understand the broad demographics of the city and review the regnant political framings of young Kurdish men in contemporary Turkish public discourse.

## DEMOGRAPHY AND ITS POLITICAL FRAMINGS

Diyarbakır is a young city in a young country. At the time of my fieldwork, in Turkey generally the proportion of the population aged 24 or below hovered around 43 to 44 percent, whilst in Diyarbakır, the number for the same age group was around 57 percent, a rate roughly comparable to other southeastern cities remade by forced migration: 61 percent in Batman, 62 percent in Hakkari, and 60 percent in Van (TÜİK). The simplest explanation for the overwhelmingly young character of southeastern cities would point to the massive influx of rural families due to forced migration, and to the relatively high birth rates common to rural families in eastern and southeastern Turkey.

In the national popular imagination, meanwhile, this simple explanation is often subjected to disparaging interpretations. One of the more insidious of these interpretations rests on a logic reminiscent of arguments used to attack American welfare policies by casting beneficiaries as undeserving due to their supposedly irrational practices of giving birth to many children in the absence of sufficient work (O'Connor 2001, Maskovsky and Morgen 2003, Wacquant 2007). The problem (or, depending on one's politics, the usefulness) of this internationally mobile discourse about poverty is that it displaces a careful consideration of political economy (declining wages and fortunes, the shifts to flexible, more precarious, and less protected forms of labor, growing socioeconomic inequalities) in favor of a focus on the behavior of the poor as the 'real' explanation of poverty. In Diyarbakır, a friend recounted an encounter on a plane with a retired teacher couple who had taken their first trip to Diyarbakır and came back filled with complaints about the high number of children in the streets of the historic city center. In the face of such poverty, one of the teachers felt that having so many children was nothing but ignorance (*cahillik*).[49] The same general idea also trickles down to parts of Diyarbakır's established bourgeois classes, many of whom speak with unabashed disdain about the influx of such rural practices into the city. I was also told by a high-ranking administrator at the Grameen Bank microcredit program in Diyarbakır, after I asked him to compare his experiences in Bangladesh and Diyarbakır, that the real roots of poverty in Diyarbakır were the same as anywhere else: men who wanted to have too many children and were too lazy to work, preferring, as he claimed, to spend their

[49] Indeed, in conversations in cities across Turkey, I have often been impressed by the ubiquity of this image of Kurds as hopelessly stuck in rural (read ignorant and premodern) ways of thinking; as having not come into sufficient contact with education and sites for the inculcation of a modern habitus; as behaving according to an irrational inertia rather than modern rationality.

time in the coffeehouse rather than find a job.[50] But holding dispossessed, ex-rural Kurds responsible for their circumstances by accusing them of keeping on with this practice of over-fertility in cities long after its practicality clearly has limited analytic utility in understanding the political economy of the city today.

Whatever underlying reason is imputed, large families are a fact. Across the southeast, the average birth rate is just below five children per house (Sönmez 2012), while in Diyarbakır, studies in neighborhoods largely inhabited by the displaced put the figure at just over six per household (Kalkınma Merkezi 2010, Sarmaşık 2009)—this versus a national average of about 2.5 children per family (TÜİK). Families of eight, nine, or more children are not hard to come by in forced-migrant-heavy neighborhoods.

Not only has the existence of such an overwhelmingly young population provided fodder for nationalist discourses that would obstruct careful dissection of the causes and trends of contemporary urban poverty in southeastern Turkey. It has also given rise to a version of youth bulge theory in Turkey. Youth bulge theory essentially correlates large young male populations in conditions of limited economic opportunity with a greater probability for political unrest and instability. Though its origins can be traced to the population geographer Gary Fuller's work for the CIA in the 1980s (Fuller and Pitts

[50] My sense was that this particular administrator had a limited empirical sense of the context he worked in, perhaps excusable given the everyday bureaucratic responsibilities of his position. He was sent from Bangladesh, did mostly office and diplomatic work and knew how to say a few everyday phrases in Kurdish and Turkish but could not participate in a conversation in either language. The superficiality of his understanding of the city was revealed in another difference he observed between Diyarbakır and Bangladesh: whereas in the latter, he said, he had mostly used bicycles to go back and forth from work to home, in Diyarbakır he had a driver. Or perhaps this was his way of erecting a wall and refusing to say much of substance about his work—something that an ex-employee of an office institutionally affiliated with microcredit told me that he and his co-workers were explicitly instructed to do when dealing with journalists and researchers. Additionally, the idea that men in Diyarbakır's coffeehouses are there out of laziness not only ignores the broader political economy of joblessness. It also overlooks the economics of coffeehouses in this context. In the absence of sufficient work, opening coffeehouses (as with opening a kebab stand or a corner store) has provided work, however low paying, for hundreds of *çaycı* and *çırak*.

1990; Fuller 1995), it has, in the decades since, seeped into journalistic and governmental common sense. A variation on this theme surfaces often in news pieces—most recently, in the wake of the so-called Arab spring—as an ostensibly scientific explanation for everything from sporadic urban riots to non-state armed political organizations subsumed under the term terrorist.

Often overlooked, however, is the fact that youth bulge theory is simply that—a theory—and should be treated as such. An exception to this common sense is the anthropologist Anne Hendrixson, who in a 2006 briefing for the UK-based Corner House discusses how youth bulge theory has been used in many international contexts to suggest that "Southern nations and Southern cities are incapable of accommodating their young populations", and to present an "over-generalised picture of a disordered South prone to a stereotypical violence and degradation that its governments are not sophisticated enough to handle" (2004:12-16). She goes on to note that the theory not only "disrespects the younger generation, underestimates its potential, and leaves it undervalued" (2004:16); it can also provide a seemingly scientific language to alarmist discourses used to justify police profiling and the military surveillance of spaces with large young populations.

In Diyarbakır and other southeastern cities, particularly after the street demonstrations in Diyarbakır in March 2006 in which young men and boys played a prominent role, the detainment and maltreatment of young men in police custody have become normalized features of the police life of the city. According to the Diyarbakır branch of the Human Rights Association, following the March demonstrations, some 400 children, by official figures, were taken into custody, while unofficial estimates suggest a figure of around 700 youth (İHD 2009). Those demonstrations were the stuff of memory

by the time this research began—significant stuff, though, referred to by some young men I spoke with as a *milat* or milestone in the city's political history. Yet the strategy of profiling, indefinite detention, and maltreatment had become a policing fixture. Backed up by alarmist images in the national media of "stone throwing children", from March 2006 until the publication of a report by a number of human rights groups in 2011, it was estimated that some 4,000 young people, mostly males, were detained or imprisoned across the southeast (see Radikal Gazetesi 2011). One of the milder but nonetheless revealing consequences of this process was reflected in this research in the fact that any time political tensions were high and police presence was intensified around the city, my young male research participants would often phone me early in the morning to reschedule our interviews or postpone our rendezvous at the coffeehouse, preferring to stay home and avoid the risk.

The media representation aspect of this political process was also not lost on the critical imaginations of the young men interviewed for this research. Complaints about the overwhelmingly negative and panicky portrayal of Diyarbakır's young men in national media were widespread. "According to them, we do nothing but throw rocks and break windows", complained one young man we shall meet below, referring to the ubiquity of such representations in the Turkish national media. Images of young men throwing rocks and participating in street demonstrations even made it to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which in 2010 passed the so-called "Law on Children Who Throw Rocks",[51] facilitating the criminal prosecution of minors for such street acts.

[51] Nazan Üstündağ suggested, in a recent conference, that rocking throwing should be seen not as a crazed act, but a political "form of negotiation" (Etkin Haber Ajansı 2012).

The equation of economically marginalized urban Kurdish youth with potential criminals or terrorists stems from the same unsound line of thinking as youth bulge theory. Rather than inquiring into the actual lives of young people, assumptions about who young Kurdish men are— or more accurately, who they may become—guide this thinking. This would be problematic enough if it stayed purely at the conceptual level, but such assumptions also become part of the ideological legitimation of policing strategies, and they feed into the souring of ordinary relations between Turks and Kurds that lead to such outbreaks of inter-communal tensions as the surge in so-called "lynching" events in the late 2000s (Sönmez 2008).

The political and moral condemnation of such constructions of youth is important, but perhaps more so is recognizing how limited such ideas are for opening up spaces for other questions about the contemporary political-economic and symbolic conjuncture in Diyarbakır. There is a clear need to replace assumptions about what young men could become with grounded explorations of the political-economic context and the meaningful and material practices of actual lives, and to take "seriously the fact that youth are cultural actors whose experiences are best understood from their own point of view" (Bucholtz 2002:523-533). With this in mind, let us begin to explore some of the fieldwork data, and to pay particular attention—to link this chapter explicitly to the others—to the ways in which, through discourses on livelihood conditions (on the lack of work, the disagreeable conditions of the work to be had, the unfulfilled potential of the educational system as a means to another working future), young men are suffusing their everyday lives with moral and political evaluations of what they take to be the injustices

of the state, and are staking out a critical stance *vis-à-vis* the state of affairs and questioning the nature of their political belonging.

## "OKAY, YES, EDUCATION'S NECESSARY, BUT…"

The role of education in the reproduction of the economic status quo, as explored in the ethnographic literature on Turkey and elsewhere, is well documented (for an exceptionally textured and well-researched ethnography of education and class in Turkey, see Balkan and Rutz 2009; on France and the UK respectively, see Bourdieu 1991 and Willis 1977). In the wake of forced migration in Diyarbakır, education has received its share of attention, particularly from NGOs. The Development Centre in Diyarbakır noted in its 2006 report on the effects of migration in Diyarbakır that migrant families tend to have low levels of literacy and educational achievement; around 45 percent of women and 17 percent of men surveyed were illiterate, while only about 8 percent of males reported graduating from high school (Kalkınma Merkezi 2006: 33). The report also notes, "During the most intense period of migration, there was an overcrowding of students in neighborhood schools, the student body doubling or even tripling in some schools. Many children, because there was no school in their villages or because they were unable to attend school, experienced problems when they started at neighborhood schools since they were older than their classmates" (2006:35). Further, because the quality of education in the village tended to be lower than in the city, many migrant children perform with low levels of success in their first years in city schools.

The regional lag in educational completion rates for young men and women has been the subject of a range of studies in the field of education, many of which turn, in

journalistic fashion, on the question of the problem's roots. According to Şahin and Gülmez (2000), for instance, the problem is essentially one of cultural difference (a term they leave under-examined), and the reforms called for are within the educational system, which the authors advise should take measures to better serve a diverse national student body. Other more critical studies explicitly reject such a culturalist explanation. Keyder and Üstündağ state unequivocally that the important obstacle before education is not cultural structure but poverty and the lack of capital investment in the region (2006:3). Still another way to appreciate how the political history of displacement and dispossession has constituted education as a problematic is through an ethnographic approach to how the problem of school touches down in specific working lives. Let us take a close look at the post-displacement trajectory of a young man whom I shall call Nimet.

I met Nimet roughly six months into research, and we have been in regular contact since. From our first extended interview, Nimet's concerns were consistently focused on what he referred to as building a future (*geleceği kurmak*), though he was ambivalent as to whether the best route for him was in continuing with high school or dropping out and devoting himself fully to finding a trade.

For most of the time I knew him, Nimet had almost none of the free time that Bayat identifies as among the qualities of youthfulness. Having been in and out of formal schooling throughout his childhood (for a variety of reasons—accidents, work—more or less directly related to forced migration and its wider consequences), he had returned to high school as a 19-year-old freshman. At the same time, he was working early mornings and late nights in his older brother's kebab stand. He effectively ran the stand for much

of the day with the help of a young assistant (*çırak*). His older brother generally showed up early in the morning and early in the evening, when he would apply his practical master knowledge (*ustalık*) to the cutting and kneading together of lamb meat, tail fat, and herbs for the minced-meat kebabs, or to the slathering of chicken pieces or cubes of liver with generous amounts of red pepper flakes and oregano. With his work done, he would then perform his expected social role as hierarchical superior in the workplace, sitting in a relaxed pose in meticulously pressed suits, conspicuously smoking an expensive brand of cigarettes and bothering to rise from his spot only when other shopkeepers on his street visited his stand (whom he would greet with great warmth and affection) or when money changed hands—which, particularly where neighboring shopkeepers were concerned, often involved prolonged rituals of the avoidance of money (on this, see Parry and Bloch 1989) and his refusal to accept payment.

As for Nimet, what little spare time he did have he preferred not to spend on the "empty things" he said he used to do: walking the streets with his friends till dawn, smoking hash, getting into mischief. He regularly attended a neighborhood gym opened by a pair of brothers, physical education teachers in Diyarbakır with ambitions of keeping kids out of trouble by getting them interested in bodybuilding and competitive arm wrestling. Nimet trained and occasionally entered national arm wrestling competitions. He took weight lifting very seriously, and was dismissive of the way that many of his young male peers from migrant households like his own would use the gym only in the late winter and early spring, lifting intensely over a short span and spending money on protein supplements, and talking loudly in the gym about going to Antalya or Marmaris or some such Mediterranean resort town in Turkey to work for the summer and perhaps

attract the eye of a foreign woman—usually, in this public fantasy, European, older, and well-off. As earnest as he was in the gym, which we often attended together, he talked about arm wrestling as little more than a hobby, with his real focus, he said, somewhere between school and work.

Nimet talked incessantly about the necessity of education and the need for "our Diyarbakır youth" to get high school diplomas. Yet before we get to those passages, perhaps we should start Nimet's account where—in asking him to narrate his work history in one of our last long recorded interviews in 2009, shortly before he left for what turned out to be a brief, disappointing construction job in Istanbul and had asked for my help in preparing a resume—he felt it best to begin.

"Born and raised in Lice, in [X] village." With just over a thousand residents around the time of his birth, by 2000 census records Nimet's natal village appeared as unoccupied, having been evacuated in 1993 by the Turkish military. While still in the village, his family's productive life involved small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. "In the village, we were eight brothers, and my mother and father, bless them. In the village, we dealt with shepherding, with animal husbandry. We produced, uh, milk, yoghurt and cheese. We'd get by with that. Also we dealt with agricultural work. We'd grow tobacco. And tomatoes or cucumbers—whatever we could, we'd grow it and sell it." Nimet couldn't recall the exact extent of their landholding—he was only around seven at the time the village was evacuated—but by the accounts of both him and his older brothers, it was enough to support the family.

By the early 1990s, the mess of internal political strife destabilized life and livelihood in Nimet's village. "There were some sorts of wars, for instance, guerrilla and

soldier—call it the PKK problem. They [the military] burned the village, or, that is, they burned a part of our village, and part of the people in the village had to flee, while part of them stayed because their financial situation was low, and they were left to die." As with many forced migrants I spoke with from villages outside of Lice, Nimet's family did not immediately come to Diyarbakır, but first attempted to settle in the nearby satellite town of Lice, where two of his older brothers had already moved for work. This move, facilitated by family, involved among other things a change in livelihood practices. With the possibilities for mixed subsistence and market agricultural production and animal husbandry destroyed, in Lice and afterwards, they relied on a combination of, at first, small-scale trade and farming of a small family plot they happened to hold on the outskirts of town, followed by a number of semi-formal service and shop keeping ventures:

> In Lice, I had brothers, two older brothers. Both were working, one in a bread bakery, and the other in a market. As for the rest of us, we had some land in Lice where we'd plant tobacco and, in part of it, grow wheat. Also, my Dad was a Cyprus veteran, my Dad used to go and come between here and Cyprus, and would bring whatchamacallit, household goods, say pots or pans, and we would take them and go street by street to different houses and we would try to sell them. *Yani*, we would engage in trade, and would profit a little from that.

But the stay in Lice was only temporary, as a military siege was soon launched on the town, in which many shops were burned and houses destroyed, and many residents fled to nearby Diyarbakır or more far-flung destinations. In our conversations and interviews, usually carried out on squat, poplar-wood stools in front of his brother's kebab stand, looking out onto the razor wire-lined walls of the nearby penitentiary that gave the neighborhood where his family settled its unusual name—*Cezaevi*, literally, prison—he

frequently came back to two memories from this period of military siege that he claimed had stayed with him since:

> Nimet: It's like Baydemir [the widely admired mayor of Diyarbakır] said on TV, I've seen more than my age (*yaşımdan çok şeyler gördüm)*. As if I've lived for a thousand years. Really, if you look at us easterners, *hele hele*, those young guys a bit older than me, if you look at them, you'd say, these guys lived a thousand years. Such psychological problems were loaded onto their backs, in such a manner that it's impossible to forget, psychologically. What I'm going to say is something like that. This I'll never forget. We lived eight brothers in a two-room, stand-alone house.
>
> Will: When you first came to Diyarbakır?
>
> N: No, this is in Lice. Now, picture this, there's nothing at home. There's no bread. Our mom, what we call tandoori (*tandır)*, our *tandır* bread, my mom had prepared the dough, you see? And when the dough had risen, well, there was a curfew in Lice. No one could go outside. Those who left home, they were picked up and taken away. And so what happened? During the curfew on this day, a gunfight broke out. I can't forget it. It was like this. Our guerrillas, they came down from the mountains into Lice, and in came the soldiers. They were firing at each other. So, we eight kids, we were all hungry. And the dough, er…
>
> W: Had risen?
>
> N: No, I mean, it was in a big plastic container (*leğen*). And there right across from our house was the *tandır*. Mom said, well either my kids are going to die from starvation or I will die from a bullet. She made a choice. Without hesitation she put her life on the line for her children. So how did she do it? When the gunshots died down, she would run and *tak*, she would slap a bread into the oven, and then run back, and then when the shots died down again, then again it was *tak*, another bread in the oven. And in this manner, she produced a full container of bread.
>
> And I'm just talking about dry bread*, aa*. Forget tomatoes or anything. Just dry bread before us, a whole *leğen* full. We, eight or nine of us, or with Mom and Dad ten, we finished that bowl of dry bread. We were that hungry. We were in such dire straits.
>
> W: How long did it go on?
>
> N: For three straight days those sounds of gunfire didn't cease. I won't forget. I was seven or eight years old. No, I was seven.
>
> W: How did you sleep?

N: There was no sleeping, brother! My mom and dad used to say, we lived those days without standing up. We slept on the floor and we did the soldier crawl across the floor, that's how we would, you'll excuse me, go to the toilet at night. Anyhow, these few days passed and then the other thing I can't forget. You know stables, animal stables? In the Saddam thing…

W: You mean *Halepçe*?

N: No, this was a military operation in Lice, the soldiers called it Saddam something. Was it the Saddam war? Anyway, at that time, the passing helicopters used chemical warfare.

W: On Lice?

N: Just like that, on Lice. They were dropping chemicals on Lice from above. Now, you drop chemicals, but here there's guilty beside innocent, civilian beside non-civilian. The civilians, what did they do to deserve this? So now, in this, what we call a stable—I mean, in our house, there were too many places that could let air in, so with my mom and dad and brothers and sisters and with some other villagers we knew, using mud from the ground below like cement, like mortar, with our hands, we filled in all the holes in the stable to keep the chemicals from getting in and making people faint. There are things you don't easily forget. And I'd say these are some of the biggest lessons you learn in life.

W: What sort of lesson?

N: What sort? Think, if one hasn't lived even this much [points to the tip of his finger] of these kinds of problems, can one come and ask me to act like I didn't live these at all? They tell us, come on, say there's no Kurdish problem, come on. Can they tell me that, brother? No, of course not. So is it possible for us to accept this?...Ahh, but now, I mean, just look now, you've asked me to explain this and now the wound is open again. Psychologically you can't forget.

Livelihood was a persistent problem for Nimet and his family after displacement. Considered too young to work by his family in their first years in the city, Nimet recalled the work that his father and older brothers carried out to support the family:

When we first came to Diyarbakır, well, our source of getting by was this. My dad worked as a porter in construction. I mean, he would go and do day labor on construction sites…I had older brothers working then, one in a coffeehouse, and one worked as an apprentice alongside a carpenter. My middle older brother, he preferred not to come to Diyarbakır, he liked Lice more. He would bring stuff to

> soldiers, bring them daily goods [cigarettes, snacks] and in that way would make a profit for himself from the soldiers.[52]

Diyarbakır was also marked by violence at the time. As we saw in earlier chapters, house raids and extrajudicial killings were rather common, as was street violence in the form of extrajudicial killings carried out by *Hızbullah*, disappearances, and bomb detonations. In the first few years, then, Nimet, like many of the migrant families I interviewed in the previous chapter, did not spend much time outside the house. But as things calmed down in the city, and as every extra wage contribution to the household began to count more and more, he began to buy cheap wholesale goods (seeds, tissues, gum) and hawk them on the street or in coffeehouses:

> As for us young ones, at first, the streets were unsound (*sakat*). Because they were unsafe, our streets, we generally stayed at home. But when we got a little older, my older brothers, in front of schools they sold sunflower seeds or gum. As for us, we did it old style. I mean, we'd sell *Hobi* ice cream or cold drinks. Or we'd make lemonade, for example. When the kids in school were at recess playing ball in summer, when they'd sweat, they'd want something cold to drink, and we gave them lemonade. Later we too started to sell gum and seeds.

Yet even if state and revolutionary violence had begun to decrease, the streets still proved dangerous in another way. It is well known in Diyarbakır that, especially in the early years of forced migration, cars hit many newcomer children, who were simply unaccustomed to city traffic. A friend and activist who has been working with children in the city for years told me that she knew of no exact figures on this, but guessed that they were quite high. Even in the comparatively small research universe of an ethnographic

[52] This last detail presents an interesting contradiction. It came just after I had gone to Lice with Nimet and spent a day walking around the town and among ruins in the nearby mountains with a few of Nimet's maternal cousins. Lice is, for its size, remarkably militarized, and as we walked past a couple of military outposts, two of Nimet's cousins openly cursed the soldiers in Kurdish. One of the cousins produced a marijuana cigarette, flashing it tauntingly before the young conscript behind the barbed wire. Nimet happily joined in the exchange of jokes about soldiers that ensued.

project, I met two young men who been hit by a car and one who had a sibling who had been.[53] As for Nimet, a car struck him full on just a few years after coming to the city:

> So time passed and when I was nine I was in a traffic accident. Again I was laid up in the University Hospital. My skull was fractured, and that's why I don't really remember much from my childhood. It seems the doctor said this to my family: 'if this kid lives, because of the fractured skull, well, there's a risk he won't live. And if he lives, he will normally experience some kind of trauma'.

In time, though, aside from occasional swelling that would send him, worried, to the hospital, and painful headaches that would make it difficult for him to concentrate even enough to carry out a normal conversation, Nimet was in good health. Wiry and muscular, he wore tight and carefully ironed shirts that showed his figure. In the kebab stand, he liked to challenge friends to arm wrestling matches. His strong hands recorded his brief but significant working life: thick, stubby, crooked fingers perpetually calloused, cut, and cracked dry in the winter, with many scars, and leathery palms. On one thumb was a deep scar from a serious cut sustained on the job while chopping meat, which gangrened and, again sending him to the hospital, almost required amputation.

More recently, with his days spread thin across school and work, he talked about the need to steer clear of the "human stables" (*insan ahırları,* a common disparaging description of coffeehouses) and to "develop himself", which to his mind meant devoting himself to formal education. However, apt as Nimet often was to pay lip service to the necessity of education, his views on its utility were ambivalent at best. He would echo truisms—"it's like they say, there's a big difference between those who have read and those who haven't, those who know and those who don't"—yet in the same breath decry

[53] Indeed, the problem continues; it was foretelling of this minor research note that on literally the very first day I arrived in Diyarbakır for fieldwork, my friend was nearly two hours late meeting me at the airport because the driver had hit a young boy in a neighborhood built by the displaced, and had to take him to the hospital.

what he saw as the substandard quality and lack of any meaningful results of education in Diyarbakır: "Diyarbakır's youngsters, at most they study until high school, and after high school, it's done. Why? Because they know that when they enter the university entrance exam, their chance of passing is, let's say, 15 percent. Most have no chance. Why? Because our eastern education is different from the western education." He elaborated on this point:

> Our teachers in the east don't spend much time on lessons or with students. They don't explain topics that well. But teachers in the west, they explain with head, heart, and soul…And so when it comes time for the exam, the ones from the east don't get a good education, while the ones in the west do. But the exam is the same for both, the questions are the same. So what happens? Our easterners remain weak. Now, there are those among us who do well, too, but what happens? They immediately take them to the west.

Nimet frequently expressed a belief that education is kept intentionally poor in the east in order to prevent the region from developing economically and politically, a belief that taps into a wider popular mode of conspiracy thinking about intentional underdevelopment explored elsewhere in this study. Whether this claim can be supported or not, his general sense of significant educational differences in eastern and southeastern Anatolia are generally confirmed in other studies of the consequences of forced migration. For instance, a major research project by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) noted that

> During interviews with the children of IDPs [policy speak meaning internally displaced persons] living in municipal neighborhoods with a high density of IDPs, the TESEV Working Group established that almost all children, male and female, are attending or have attended primary school. However, the rate of post-primary school attendance is rather low. Based on what the group could gather from its interviews, the quality of education in these neighborhoods is quite poor and classrooms are overcrowded. [2007: 212]

Completing high school was a challenge not only for Nimet but for many of his male

peers. In part, this was because of crowded classrooms and teachers assigned often against their will to the southeast who, according at least to Nimet and his friends, were uninspiring and were often unwilling to deal constructively with the discipline problems that frequently arose in the classroom, preferring instead to cancel lessons or simply let them pass without teaching. But another factor affecting graduation rates was the fact that a majority of the young men from displaced households simply had to work to contribute to the livelihood of their families. And balancing work and school often made studying in earnest a challenge. Nimet was not unique in imagining this problem as wrapped up with questions of state culpability; he saw the state as behind the conditioning of different degrees of "opportunity" (*imkân*) for young people in the east of Turkey and young people in the west, which in his eyes meant that the state actively structured different futures. In this particular exchange, the kebab stand was short on help, so he was showing me how to fold a head of lettuce tightly and chop it in the thin way his brother preferred for salads and *dürüm* toppings while he ran back and forth from the tables to the grill. When the *çırak* and his older brother finally showed up, the latter graciously gave Nimet a break, and we sat and drank tea outside a nearby bakery where his friend worked. Nimet was engaged in friendly same-street-sociality with an older man who brought us tea. I was scribbling down a few of the quotes that someone in the prison administration had had painted on its outer walls—"The biggest prison is inside the mind of an ignorant person", and "If you want to know a man, look at the company he keeps"—and when he returned, Nimet first shared with me the news that he had decided to drop out, before I turned on the recorder and reminded him of a sentence I had heard his friends and him toss around frequently: "our opportunities are very limited

(*imkânlarımız çok kısıtlı*)":

> Nimet: Definitely limited, my brother, definitely limited. What they call limited, do you know what that is?
>
> Will: Well how about you, what does it mean to you, could you explain a bit?
>
> N: Well, let's start with education. The state says, we give you an education, we teach you. Okay*, eyvallah*, you give an education, you teach. But there's no sincerity, no truth.
>
> W: From the state?
>
> N: From the state. For instance, if you go to the west, it's full education to the kids, and full opportunities. Now, if for our Diyarbakır youngsters, if one third of those opportunities were presented, all of us would have studied, all of us would have done something. I believe this very much, with my most inner belief, we would have done it, no doubt we would have! If I had those opportunities, if I had those chances, I would want to study. To finish and find work. You know me more or less. On the one hand, I would very much like to study. But on the other, I must help my family. So then what was I doing [before dropping out]? Half day work, half day school. But what came of it? A bit to this, a bit to that, but I didn't understand anything fully from either. It's got to be full school or full work or it's nothing.

A couple of years after dropping out, on a recent visit to Diyarbakır, Nimet still talked about the necessity of education and said that he might pursue the equivalent of a GED in the future, but "not with the aim of certainly becoming this or that", he added. His sense of how to build a working future rather now seemed more attuned to entering into another hierarchical structure for building a future: the advancement of becoming a master of a trade. He was searching for work in the field of construction, and meanwhile was keeping up a public face in his neighborhood through still helping out at his brother's stand and trying to build and maintain a public identity as a reliable, upright, and moral man worthy to be a neighborhood *esnaf*. His sense of education's value was now geared to navigating state bureaucracy and defending himself when needed: "Maybe I'll make use of that information one day, to be able to defend my own rights. For instance, if I

happen to have to do something in a state institution, I'll know what's what." For the time being, though, his sense of his chances for building a viable future through the state educational system was virtually nonexistent.

If for Nimet the salient reasons behind education's limited future-provision for young men were tied to what he assumed to be the politically-motivated poor quality of education and to the practical, temporal pressures of having to work to help see to his family's getting by, for other young men I talked to, other reasons came into play. Two prominent themes were 1) language barriers, and 2) discrimination faced by those students who followed another possible educational route in the southeast, and one with a controversial history wrapped up with accusations of underlying assimilationist intentions: the boarding schools that offer poor Kurdish children room and board and a chance to devote themselves entirely to their studies so long as they live apart from their families for the duration of schooling.

Making it possible for children to study in Kurdish, the first language of a majority of people in the southeast, is currently among the chief demands of the Kurdish movement in Turkey and its push for expanded 'cultural rights' and 'linguistic rights'. Most of the relevant NGOs working on various aspects of the so-called Kurdish problem in Turkey also make mention of the need for education in Kurdish. One everyday take on this matter came from a young man who worked nights in a *simit* oven—another surfacing of *simit* in this study. Like Nimet, he remembered clearly watching his natal village—also outside Lice, but far from Nimet's—burn. The villagers set up camp outside a nearby village where some people had relatives by marriage, but the military threatened the already settled villagers in not so veiled ways, claiming that the fires that

the campers lit to stay warm could easily be mistaken by soldiers as PKK camps and that the solider could not be held responsible if the village were consequently fired upon. So, after some time the villagers asked their camping friends to leave, causing the displaced to again attempt to return to their village, which in turn prompted the military to again burn what attempts they made to rebuild. The *simitçi*'s early memories of Diyarbakır, he said, were of arriving on foot with "nothing but the clothes on our back"—another stock image used by the displaced to describe the conditions of arrival, one that I heard countless times—and feeling literally physically lost in the city. By the time I met him to do a series of interviews, he had long since left high school. His shift in the bakery started around 10 at night and lasted until four or five in the morning. Work started with him pouring the right measures of flour, oil, salt, and rising agents into the commercial-sized metal mixer in the back of the bakery. On one occasion, I jokingly asked him if he cared that the huge tin of oil he was using was stamped with an expiration date of over a month before. He laughed and said that his employers did not pay him enough to care. Once the dough's mix cycle was finished, he brought the yellowish oily mass onto a huge cool slab of marble in the middle section of the bakery—marble is plentiful around Diyarbakır, and certain grades can be purchased for relatively inexpensive prices in the southeast, making it a common feature in businesses of all economic scales—just beside the deep, tile-lined, wood-fired oven. The mound of dough sat covered with a cloth while, for the next few hours, the young baker formed the dough and, when called for, stuffed it with cheese or sprinkled it with sesame and nigella seeds, to prepare the various breakfast savory pastries—in addition to *simit*, he also made *açma, poğaça,* and two Diyarbakır specialties, *yağlı ekmek* and *çörek*, the latter flavored with the kernel of St.

Lucie cherries—that would be sold from the glass counters in the shop front or distributed to a variety of semi-formal economic actors in the surrounding neighborhood—unlicensed shopkeepers who sold the pastries, along with perhaps a fruit juice, to morning commuters, or to young boys who came and bought a tray of *simit* and went from coffeehouse to coffeehouse with the tray balanced on their head, yelling "*simiiiiit, sıcak simiiiiit*".

Shaping dough one evening into hundreds of small rings, he recounted the jobs he had done to support his family since their arrival to Diyarbakır in the early 1990s. The list echoes Nimet's work history. He sold packs of tissues and gum on the city streets. When the weather was warm, he stood outside of school playgrounds, selling popsicles. He shined shoes, worked as an errand boy in half a dozen restaurants and teahouses, and when he dropped out before completing middle school to begin his current job in this small neighborhood bakery, he became one of his family's main breadwinners. He was an unabashed sympathizer of the PKK, and spoke freely of his wish to join their struggle as a guerrilla, if only he were not so responsible for his family's wellbeing. As for school, he echoed Nimet's political take on education, but along different lines. The problem for him was in part the ideological content of instruction.

> Already when you look at it, schools just teach you always the aspects where Turkey was in the right. It's always, 'Atatürk did this and that, he attacked them like that, we did this to them, we battled', things like this. But these don't show their true aims. I mean, I'm saying for example, I mean, this is valid for all people and for all states they always try, when actually in the wrong, to do every kind of effort to show themselves in the right.

Equally irritating for this young man was the simple fact of having to use a language different from his mother tongue in school. "Why do we always have to use their language and express ourselves like Turks?" It was for reasons of having to support his

family that he cut his education short after middle school, but perceptions of education as a part of a Turkish nationalist system he saw as discriminating unfairly against Kurds convinced the baker that non-participation was the right choice in a system that, to his mind, only offered him a viable future if he were to accept the assimilationist logic he saw as embedded in national education.

Beyond overcrowded schools, or schools that students' families simply could not afford to have them attend (since they could also be working and bringing in much-needed household income) there is another path of education open to young men in the southeast: boarding schools. Journalist and scholar Aliza Marcus, in her exceptional history of the PKK, which builds on extensive research and interviews with ex-PKK members, describes the political logic motivating the creation of boarding schools. "Ankara hoped that offering educational opportunities to Kurds would hasten their assimilation by teaching them the Turkish language and history as if it were their own. In 1961, special regional boarding schools were established to remove Kurdish children from their home environment and educate them in a wholly Turkish one" (Marcus 2007: 26-27). Yet, as she and other analysts have noted (McDowall 1996), in many instances this had the effect of in fact strengthening Kurdish identity, as students traveled, studied, and met other Kurds in educational exile with whom they could discuss their experiences.

In Aziziye, a neighborhood described in the previous chapter, I met a number of young men of migrant families who had attended boarding schools. One of them—call him Mustafa—was around 18 at the time of our series of four interviews. He was then working full time in his older brother's vegetable stand, having recently dropped out of a school in İzmir. The basic reason for his relocation was a crisis in the family. The death

of his eldest brother—the main breadwinner—from chronic kidney disease had put the family in a difficult financial situation. Mustafa felt obliged to return to Aziziye and help his family. In our interviews and, more, in our countless unrecorded exchanges spread across more than 18 months—I spent many hours sitting outside his shop, talking with the group of young men who congregated there most evenings—he often returned to his conflicted feelings on having left the school. On the one hand, there were pleasurable aspects of his life in İzmir and joyous memories; the school had a motor scooter, for instance, that he was allowed to use on occasion, which he often took to the seaside, or used to visit local street markets, where he was amused by the language and the habits of the pastoral nomads (*yörük*) who came down from their mountain camps to buy provisions. Mustafa described their manner, dress, and ways of talking as rough and uncivilized, and joked that if Turks want to criticize Kurds as backwards or as speaking improper Turkish, they should first look inside their own geographies and at "their own people". He recalled his days in boarding school as marked by no worries about the need to work; he was able to devote himself fully to schoolwork, and had good relations with one teacher who had encouraged him to consider going to university for something related to computer maintenance.

On the other hand, Mustafa complained bitterly about other students' taunts. Every time there was resurgence in violence in the southeast, he was called a terrorist, and students would ask him what he thought were racist questions such as whether it was true that Kurds have tails or that their blood runs another color. (Similar myths also surface in the oral accounts collected in the journalist Nadire Mater's masterful *Mehmedin Kitabı* (1999), a once-banned book of interviews with soldiers conscripted to

fight in the 1990s in the southeast.) Otherwise less political than many of his peers, Mustafa said that he had seriously considered joining the PKK a number of times because of this treatment. Although, having come to know him fairly well by the end of my research, I have doubts as to whether he would have carried through on this, doubtless this experience contributed greatly to his sense of being different from the rest of Turkey on account of being a Kurd.

Nevertheless, his time in İzmir had left Mustafa with doubts as to his working future. At least, as he repeatedly put it to me, he felt that he had acted morally by returning to help his family. But comparing his possibilities for future work with the trajectories of his older brothers, Mustafa often wondered whether he had made a mistake in choosing a life almost assured to be defined by long work hours and sub-minimum-wage pay.

Sensitive and sometimes pensive, Mustafa's moods swung from despondency to flashes of excitement, as in when he would explain fictional plots he had in mind for television scripts or short stories, a particular favorite involving a retired boxing champion who was conscripted and sent to fight in the southeast and, scarred after having seen something terrible in battle, married a woman in Diyarbakır fleeing a life of prostitution and decided to stay in the city. He seemed, in other words, caught between difficult conditions and dreams of something else.

But we are getting ahead, as this last matter—dreams of escape—is the subject of the next chapter. Here, the effort has been to show, through ethnographic detail, the ways in which discourses about livelihood and how to create a viable working future are "shot through", in Bakhtin's phrase, with moral and political evaluations of the state as an

unjust actor.

# CHAPTER 5
# BUILDING A FUTURE II: THE AMBIGUOUS PROMISE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND FANTASIES OF ESCAPE

Reading through most any local government or NGO report on the challenges of Diyarbakır's post-displacement urban economy, one is likely to find a section entitled something along the lines of 'recommendations and solutions'. In light of the fact of wide agreement that unemployment and poverty are among the city's most pressing problems, it is probably not surprising that one of the most common proposals offered in these reports is for expanded opportunities for *mesleki eğitim,* or vocational training. In fact, in Sarmaşık's *A Map of Urban Poverty,* "opening vocational training courses" was the top demand among households surveyed (2009: 41).

Researchers at the International Labor Organization agree with Diyarbakır's displaced and dispossessed about the importance of vocational training. A 2008 report makes the point that although in impoverished geographies people may lament the lack of work, this should not be interpreted to mean that people are not working. The question is rather one of quality and productivity of work. "The problem in many developing countries is not the absence of work, but rather the prevalence of work that is insufficiently productive to yield a decent income" (ILO 2008: 5). Framing the problem of economic inequality and problems in finding work as in part one of the differential productivity of forms of work, the report advocates vocational training in impoverished spaces as a way of encouraging, over time, a shift of labor power from, in the ILO's terms, the informal to the formal economy by making laborers more "employable".

Vocational training enjoys support in many economic geographies marked by problems of decent incomes, with World Bank funds and technical support available for

"VET"—the institution's acronym for vocational education and training—which the Bank sees as an important step in market "integration" in "low- and middle-income countries" (Gill et al. 2000). Back in Diyarbakır, in 2006 MEKSA, a self-described public benefit foundation (*kamuya yararlı vakıf*), established an office in the city. A national foundation—as of 2011, it had 22 training centers in 13 of Turkey's 81 provinces—MEKSA brings together a range of public and private actors (state employment and education ministries, trade unions, state-private institutions set up to encourage so-called SMEs, or small to medium sized enterprises, *KOBİ'*ler in Turkish, a catchphrase of neoliberal visions of economic development (see Elyachar 2005)) with the stated aim (note the use of World Bank language) of "achiev[ing] a connection between VET and employment" (MEKSA n.d.). Much of the foundation's funding is secured through support from private companies in Germany and Switzerland and from a combination of EU, ILO, World Bank, and UNDP grants. Founded in 1985, a short time after a military coup that initiated a series of changes, some swift and some taking longer to enact, to the role of the state in the intervention in and regulation of economic life in Turkey, which generally led to the transfer of many state functions to private or semi-state/semi-private institutions, there are reasons to apply the label of neoliberal to MEKSA's birth.

Yet labeling an initiative neoliberal in its general features is, as James Ferguson has suggested in a compelling article on the potentials of various 'neoliberal' poverty relief programs in southern Africa (Ferguson 2007), a separate matter from assessing and understanding practical consequences. On the surface, vocational training would seem to be a beneficial step in economic rebuilding in Diyarbakır, since, for reasons explored

above, few of the children of migration follow state formal education beyond middle school or high school. This combination of little formal education and few jobs—or, as the ILO would have it, few jobs with decent incomes—tends to push young willing workers into off-the-books economic sectors. As one young program participant summarized things, sounding very much like the other young man quoted in the epigraph, "If you don't study, either you have to go outside of Diyarbakır and work in, for example Ankara or Istanbul, or you stay in Diyarbakır and you have to deal with whatever job you can get, whether it's construction work or a coffeehouse." What vocational training would seem to offer—if training were targeted to work with assured demand—is to help alleviate this situation of migrant labor in temporary and informal economies, and to allow people to build viable livelihoods—to build futures—while staying in Diyarbakır. What it also may amount to is the creation, a generation down the line, of a class of proletarianized Kurds from the aftermath of dispossession.[54]

In any event, even if at a small scale, vocational training is underway. MEKSA, once opened, began cooperating with local governmental and non-governmental institutions to offer vocational classes in computer skills, automotive maintenance, and natural gas line maintenance. Sarmaşık, a non-governmental organization described in earlier chapters, was an important agent in helping to direct applicants to MEKSA. As far as I witnessed the process, families would visit Sarmaşık to inquire about enrolling for access to the NGO's low-cost subsidized food bank, but were found, however clearly in need of assistance, to be ineligible according to the organization's criteria, the most

[54] This is a thorny question; how to make sense of calls by people for what might amount to their own exploitation, particularly if the alternative—constant economic precariousness—is perhaps even more undesirable?

important of which is that there should be no adult men in the applicant's household who could (at least hypothetically) work. Such applicants were forwarded to MEKSA and assisted in the application process. Others showed up by word of mouth to apply.

Applying for a position in MEKSA involved passing a determination of need followed by a written exam covering fundamental literacy and analytical skills. Then, however many positions were open for a particular program, that many top scorers on the written exam were offered spots.

An interesting aside is that MEKSA was furthermore co-opted, in a rather harmless sense of the term, by local politicians, in an instance of the politics of poverty recognition and poverty relief. The mayor of the city, for instance, in a press release announcing the publication of Sarmaşık's "A Map of Urban Poverty" and describing the organization's work along the lines of enrolling Diyarbakır's urban poor in the training program, drew a clear distinction between an approach to poverty relief through vocational training that this initiative represented and what he described as the failed limits of extant state policies of poverty relief:

> It's clear that the approach we've grown familiar with, the attitudes, actions, and understandings of assistance, have not brought many results. Doubtless, state and government institutions are responsible to the first degree in terms of finding a solution for the macroeconomic problems of unemployment and poverty, the authority having been granted to them. And it is clear that our region and our city are critically in need of employment. But up to this point, the things that state and government institutions have done are not to open employment areas, but to put the region's and the city's people into the position of consumer or dependent with their 'charity' (*hayır*) policies.

The mayor and other local officials frequently summed up the aim of this project and its not-so-subtle jab at the policies of the national government under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP by its Turkish acronym) through a cliché

international in scope: rather than giving people fish, we are teaching them to fish. The same cliché caught on among some of the program participants I spoke with. Said one young participant:

> Veysel: I mean, if they [the central government] sincerely wanted to help, if they sincerely wanted to develop this region, I mean, forget about washing machines, forget about macaroni, forget about social assistance. You give these, but to what end? How far can a guy go with that? But give a guy an opportunity in a vocation? Something he can develop, something he can live on?
>
> Will: Something he could continue with?
>
> V: Yeah, I mean, you know my story, I went to the natural gas course, and the director said a nice thing. He said, here we teach you to fish. And so we say, thanks to them we're eating the bread of this [program].

But beyond the clichés and the political framing of such programs, their implementation remains complicated. *Mesleki eğitim* necessarily is nested in local contexts and local political economies of labor. In the ILO's general formulation, providing low-earning laborers in informal sectors with job skills is seen as a means to help them transit from the so-called informal economy. And indeed this may happen in certain economic contexts. But what is accomplished by vocational training without a wider infrastructure of capitalist investment and employment opportunities in the so-called formal economy? That is, in the era of cities competing for private capital investment, is being able to show a workforce with a certain set of vocational skills enough to attract employers to cities? If you build it, will they come? If they do not, are such programs not then simply preparing skilled labors who will leave the region for other geographies of labor?

Consider the trajectory of one young man—call him Serhat—who applied for the natural gas line maintenance program. Natural gas was just arriving to Diyarbakır in the late 2000s, and to Serhat and others, it seemed to offer a promising trade. His village

outside of Lice was, like Nimet's in the previous chapter, evacuated and partially destroyed by military forces in 1993. Since coming to Diyarbakır, he had dropped out of school after receiving his middle school diploma and had been working for five years alongside an older brother, a glasscutter. Also like Nimet, Serhat had re-started his schooling, and was among the oldest students in his sophomore class. He had heard of MEKSA from a friend and, living in an apartment with his parents and four of his unmarried older brothers in Bağlar, not far from Sarmaşık's office, the two young men went together to apply. On the exam, they placed 61st and 62nd, with his friend just one point ahead of him. This put them well below the natural gas line maintenance training class's cut-off line of the top twenty. As it turned out, a second section was opened and enough people declined the offer of admission such that Serhat's friend received a call. The friends met and talked about who should enter the course, and as a result Serhat's friend informed MEKSA that he would rather Serhat join the class about which he had heard him talk so enthusiastically and which the friend felt would mean so much to Serhat's family's budget. Such was how Serhat was offered a spot.

The course met five times a week for one hour. The schedule meant that Serhat could still help out in his older brothers' various enterprises—in addition to the glasscutter, one was a salesman at a small neighborhood shop selling inexpensive bathroom fixtures. In those first months of the course, doing what I did with Serhat—spending time with him while he was at work carrying new sinks or preparing a mirror or a window—he was clearly physically exhausted. It was no surprise, then, when after a few weeks he called at a time when I knew he should otherwise have been at school and suggested we take a stroll around the city walls. Explaining that he had thought a long

time before taking his decision—"that way if someone asks you to explain yourself, you won't be stuck"—and had chosen in the end to leave school and devote himself entirely to vocational training, he said:

> *Vallahi*, I said, shall I go to my MEKSA or shall I go to school? And I said, I'll see it to the end, whichever one takes. But *valla*, there was a period, the day started at eight, and then I'd go from school to MEKSA, weekdays five days, five hours. Then I'd go, running, to school, then I'd go straight to my big brother's workplace and work until one or two in the morning, and I was lucky if I slept four or five hours. *Vallahi*, for three months, it was running about and misery, running about and misery. And so I said, if I'm going to give [MEKSA] five days and five hours, then I have to earn this document [a certificate of mastery in gas maintenance]. Of course there's no guarantee of that…But I went and I passed the first test.

When at work in his brothers' shops, in his free time, Serhat would practice and demonstrate for me the skills of pipe maintenance he had learned in the course. He would commandeer whatever objects were around and explain the lessons he had had regarding tapping and affixing gas lines, and would rehearse the moves he had yet to master. Many weeks passed with him especially concerned with the final test at the end of the first three-month section, the so-called yellow line test that involved tapping a main and having three engineers certify its safety.

A few weeks into the course, Serhat came to learn that his physical education teacher from high school was also participating in the course, in an alternate section. Serhat had made plenty of enemies, he said, in his high school before leaving, but he was on very good terms with his PE teacher. Although as a state civil servant his teacher was legally barred from opening a shop of his own, he intended—in a fairly common way of bypassing the paperwork required to participate in the registered economy—to arrange for a nephew to use his certificate and open a small natural gas heater installation and maintenance shop. The teacher suggested Serhat work alongside his nephew, which for

some time made Serhat overjoyed: "Now I'll be of use at home." The would-be job promised health insurance, use of a company mobile phone, and wages at 600 lira (about 350 USD) lira a month, right around minimum wage at the time. "For Diyarbakır, *hele hele*, for a kid like me, this is a very, very good wage." However, things did not turn out as planned. Serhat did end up working for his ex-teacher's relative some time before he received his final certification. But few of the promised work conditions materialized: months passed before his first wages were paid, and he never received health insurance. Then came an unexpected contingency of life. Only a short time into the job (which, however questionable in its start, Serhat was willing to give a chance), he was called for 18 months of mandatory military service required of nearly all males in Turkey. He counted himself lucky that he was able to obtain his certificate from the course before leaving, and luckier still that, after a brief training period in Ankara he was stationed not to the southeast but to northern Cyprus. His boss meanwhile had promised work upon return. Yet a little more than a year after completing fieldwork, when I returned to Diyarbakır and visited Serhat's brother's shop and followed up on his work trajectory, he explained that he had returned from military service and had visited the same workplace only to encounter a wholly different agreement: no insurance, no telephone, and two-thirds the original pay. He began working, but soon quit, frustrated and disappointed.

Serhat was initially enthusiastic about the program, seeing it as a multiplying force of economic development for Diyarbakır:

> Think, if there are 20 guys like me, if they do the program and get the certificate. And if I open a workplace, I'll bring two or three guys and the next guy will do the same. So you multiply that 20 by a few and things grow, and a whole branch…I mean, natural gas is coming and who is going to eat its bread? The engineer will eat its bread, the master alongside will eat its bread as will the

> apprentice alongside the master, and the pipe maintenance man will eat its bread as will his apprentice, the tester.

As of 2011, however, Serhat was without the promise of a viable "formal" work future. Still he said he was very satisfied that he had a certificate in hand (more below on the certificate as a highly symbolic piece of material culture), but said that he had gone through some "very hard days" after returning from military service, expecting good work but finding himself in a less secure place than when he left. His rationalization, in a telephone exchange in 2011, was, "at least I'm not in debt to anyone and I haven't broken anyone's heart." But there was a sense in which his general view of his chances for building a future in Diyarbakır had dimmed. "You look at Diyarbakır's economy, and you think, five years later there will be no difference between here and South Africa."[55] Whereas before, the arrival of natural gas and the fact of his certificate in hand seemed to spell a secure future, Serhat more recently talked about "doubts regarding the future". "I wonder, will I be like my brothers? Will I be like my father? I don't have to be! I won't accept being unemployed." In another post-fieldwork, follow-up interview, he continued on the theme of age and the future:

> Come what may, if I'm to succeed, if I'm to do something, anyway it will have to be while I am young. If, at 30 or 40, if I'm still looking for work and I say, take me on, they're going to say, what's your profession? And if I say, I don't have a profession, they'll say, what are you going to do for me at this age? Right now I'm young, almost 20, life's most productive period, right? And right now I trust myself a great deal. I believe I can achieve something. Already after a certain age, around 30 or 40, the body starts to deteriorate, the brain slows down. At least natural gas is a job with social insurance, a clean job. Already my parents are quite old, and I won't be able to benefit from their support. If I can at least get something from natural gas, at least I can save my own life.

[55] It is unclear why he chose this particular reference. It would seem to blend two images. One is the association of Africa with poverty, which we shall see in a later ethnographic passage in this chapter. The other probably refers to debates that were circulating in the media at the time of this interview suggesting that the trajectory of Kurdish-Turkish inter-communal and state-citizen relations in Turkey were moving in the direction of apartheid.

Not unlike the young men in vocational training courses profiled in a recent New York Times article in the wholly different cultural context of America's geographies of marginal employment, where "without high school, much less college, many young people — particularly men and members of minority groups — end up doing low-skill work, relying on their youth and brawn" and where "job prospects often fade altogether as workers age" (NYT: 2011), Serhat felt a clear pressure to enter into a technical career path while still in full possession of his own youthful brawn. However, the unregistered and unprotected work agreement he entered into—informality being both redeemer and ruin of Diyarbakır's displaced labor economy—meant that he would have to postpone his search for "clean" (Tr. *temiz*, meaning in this context, secure, insured, good conditions) work.

What to make of his experience? The point is not to use Serhat's troubles in securing work to make broad generalizations. Yet his experiences suggest that there are reasons to question whether greater economic regulation and the formalization of informal economic relations are truly the keys to securing viable working futures. I heard many voices in city local government and NGOs make the argument for greater formalization of economic relations—greater enforcement of commercial licenses and tax payment to cut down on the number of unregistered businesses and more oversight of workplace practices to reduce the regularity of work with no guarantee of the sort that landed Serhat in his precarious position. Established, formalized shopkeepers also tend to call for greater regulation of *kaçak* (roughly, unsanctioned; see the following chapter for a discussion of this concept) economic ventures as a reactionary measure against the changes to the urban economy that displacement brought and for the protection their own

established livelihoods. The story of Serhat or other participants I met who also struggled to secure decent work should not be taken as evidence to impugn MEKSA or to discredit vocational training's promise.

Nevertheless, there is an undeniable impasse facing such programs in the contemporary political-economic conjuncture, when conditions of labor would seem to not allow for the realization of their aims. Aspects of the rhetoric of Diyarbakır's mayor cited above are too geared to the requirements of making the headlines to be of much analytic use, but the broader critical point that he and his party have been upholding is valid: although the national state has the most power to bring greater opportunities for employment to the southeast, across successive governments—not just AK Party rule—there has been little serious commitment shown towards transforming the structural conditions of the unequal distribution of wealth and work opportunities across the diverse economic geography of Anatolia. In such conditions, programs such as MEKSA, however laudable and practically grounded as they may be, remain only as effective as the wider context of day-to-day working conditions allows. Because of Diyarbakır's precarious working conditions, Serhat and other program participants, many of them children of migration whose households arrived at their impoverished present as a result of the political violence and uprooting of the early 1990s, encountered in *mesleki eğitim* something ambiguous. Largely unable to enter university and counting themselves fortunate to have finished high school, vocational training would seem to provide the promise of a viable work future, which was the express preoccupation of so many of the young men I met for this study. A certificate of completion from MEKSA seemed to promise a relatively stable, relatively decent paying job, social insurance, and the

possibility of establishing an independent household. But the work future of vocational training can only go as far as the forms of work the city's economy allow. Thus the collision of such a political-economic context with the temporal imagination of young men looking to build a future and to work their way to basic wage security ended, in Serhat's case as in others, in disappointed expectations. Again, recalling the previous chapter's critique of youth bulge theory, this situation yielded not criminals or terrorists, but, at least in my experience, a swaying between disappointment and redoubled resolve to find a way out of the conditions of a lack of decent, sustaining work, and an augmented perception of the state as the agent behind their struggles. Which leads us to the second ethnographic theme of this chapter: the visions, schemes, and plans that many of the young men of displaced families whom I met cultivated and shared.

## PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINES, BURIED TREASURE, AND THE PURSUIT OF *SERTIFIKA*

For all the reach of formal sites of preparation (education, vocational training), I encountered more young men who were trying to create a future by other means, some by entering into labor hierarchies of apprenticeship leading to craft mastery, and some by less specifiable practices of nurturing dreams of an escape from the dilemmas of a depressed urban economy. This escape was sometimes articulated in very literal terms as an escape from the city itself, and from the dead-end work paths that many young migrant men's backgrounds, when fit with the local political economy of labor, made all but inevitable. Interestingly, as we will see, the endpoint of this imagined escape was usually articulated, in the late 2000s at least, as not to another city in Turkey, but overseas, which is likely a reflection of the fact that increasingly Kurds migrating, seasonally or otherwise, to the west of Turkey were encountering forms of local hostility

and violence summarized by independent scholar, critical political economist of the southeast, and journalist Mustafa Sönmez in this way: "In Diyarbakır, on this my fourth trip to the city this year, from the Diyarbakırites I met and talked with, the words I heard most were these: things here are good, here we feel secure and calm. It may come as ironic, but despite all the poverty and unemployment and the conflict environment, they have ceased migrating from the region" due to the violence they encountered in other cities (2012). It seems to have been more available to thought, in other words, in such a climate to imagine leaving Diyarbakır for Amsterdam than for Adana.

Other times, this escape took a less literal form. The aim was not to escape a city to which many residents express a deep attachment. As one young man said, "Diyarbakır is beautiful, *vallahi billahi* go and find the most beautiful and most abundant cities of Turkey and still you won't find anything beyond it." Rather, the aim was to devise a means to escape the working futures that many young men witnessed in their older siblings and peers.

Take Bawer. Bawer was not, technically, a child of forced migration, but nor is his trajectory separate from the events of the 1990s. His parents were born in a village outside the small city of Silvan. Thought to be one of the key regional population centers in northern Mesopotamia many centuries ago—perhaps the center of early Armenian kingdoms—by the twentieth century, Silvan was an impoverished space, something between a city and a town, of mostly Kurdish shopkeepers and traders and surrounded by Kurdish shepherding and farming villages. Bawer's natal village's inhabitants mostly made a living from agriculture and animal husbandry. In Silvan, there was a state-established tobacco processing plant, where Bawer's parents, having grown up

cultivating and processing tobacco, found work. They moved the family from the village to the town when Bawer was very young, and as employees of a state factory, his parents looked forward to living on a modest but sufficient pension in the small house they had built in Silvan.

Political history intervened. Silvan was one of the centers of the violent religious paramilitary organization known as Hızbullah, to which the state turned a blind eye in the early 1990s. Bearing no links with the similarly named movement in Lebanon—the southeastern Anatolian movement is sometimes called Kurdish Hızbullah to avoid confusion—the movement emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Diyarbakır, with religious bookstores providing its early organizational bases, and was committed to the overthrow of the secular Turkish state. The reason that the Turkish state turned a blind eye, at a point, to Hızbullah's activities was that it was hoped that the group might act as an effective counterinsurgency measure to the PKK. But the group quickly spiraled out of control, and led to, among other things, the assassination in 2001 of the popular Diyarbakır police chief Gaffar Okkan. Bawer recalled meetings like those he attended as a young teenager as filled with talk about Iran as an important model for revolutionary theocratic political movements, though he added that almost no one present had been to Iran nor knew much about the context or consequences of its revolution. As the movement shifted its base from Diyarbakır in the 1980s, Silvan and Batman became important centers of operation. Bawer was nearly shot in a street battle and shortly thereafter decided to leave the organization. That decision, however, put him in a state of constant paranoia on Silvan's street. By a path that he declined to explain in detail, after a few years of looking constantly over his shoulder he found himself gravitating to the

PKK, to the extent that he claims to have made all the arrangements with the local recruiters and gone to the bus station in Silvan to meet the men who were to escort him to a training camp in northern Iraq. The men were late to arrive and Bawer's relatives, suspecting something, came to the station and ushered him home.

If political history had made life in Silvan troubling for Bawer and his family, personal history also intervened. An elder brother of Bawer's had fallen in love with a young woman and eloped. The bride's family approached Bawer's parents and asked for a significant sum of money—an *ex post facto* bride wealth meant to smooth over the potentially explosive breach of custom. Having little choice but to agree, the family, lacking such a high sum and with no access to family loans or any other means of credit, went to a man at a known table in the neighborhood coffeehouse, the only source they knew: a *tefeci,* a loan shark. *Tefeciler* are scorned but common figures across Turkey's informal economic spaces. The rate of interest they charge on loans is high, and after a certain period of non-payment the original starts to compound rapidly and threats of violence increase. Though I have been unable to locate a study to confirm this, many people I spoke with about *tefecilik* claimed that the phenomenon grew rapidly across the period of dispossession and widespread economic deterioration of the 1990s. In any case, such was Bawer's family's situation. They lost their savings and soon had to sell their house to escape the threats of their shady creditors.

Bawer meanwhile had left high school in Silvan when things became too tense. "The environment was spoiled", as he put it, by constant fighting and threats between students sympathetic to the PKK and those with ties to Hızbullah. Particularly after he left Hızbullah, returning to school was, he felt, too risky. By his telling, for his father it

was a combination of a sense of shame at having lost everything and his worry that, with a growing number of extrajudicial killings and disappearances on the streets of Silvan, his sons would be in danger that drove the family to leave Silvan for Diyarbakır. Thus, the family arrived to the city around the same time as thousands of forced migrants, as uprooted and dispossessed as them, but by different means. And once in Diyarbakır, with the family stripped of its home and holdings and now required to pay rent, for Bawer, returning to school was less a priority than working to contribute to the family's livelihood. Effectively, in other words, Bawer found himself in roughly the same economic position as many of the sons of forced migration.

Shortly after we met through a mutual friend, and after Bawer had shared with me the details of his family's trajectory, I asked him to bring me to Silvan, walk me through the town, and explain his memories by pointing out the streets and schoolyards he had mentioned in his recollections. Our friend, present when I asked, suggested that we might also arrange some interviews with displaced villagers now living in Silvan, which, he proposed, could make for an interesting comparison to Diyarbakır.

The trip resulted in no helpful interviews, but was revealing nonetheless. We agreed on a time and met early the next morning in a coffeehouse by the intra-province bus terminal for a quick breakfast of tea and *simit* before boarding an extended van bound for Silvan. Our mutual friend was accompanying us, too, but called to say that he would be late. Sensing an opportunity in our time alone, Bawer reached into his bag and produced a small notebook and asked if I would allow him to "hurt my head" and to explain to me some of the ideas he was working on. I had no idea what to expect, as up to this point, I only knew that he was working part time in an internet café with an

unsavory reputation. I knew he was anxious to find new work, as on two previously meetings he had invited me to accompany him as he visited shop spaces for rent, hoping to open his own internet café and hinting that he was looking for investors. Opening the notebook, he leafed through the first dozen pages, which were filled with sketches of what resembled a hula-hoop set inside a cake pan, with a few small rods jutting out from the outer rim of the pan at acute angles. He then explained his plan to solve the "problem that none of the great scientists, not even Einstein, could solve". He asked rhetorically, "What is that problem, do you know", and leaned in dramatically to reveal the secret: "A perpetual motion machine, *hocam*".

He flipped quickly through pages of drawings that I could not decipher, and said without irony that he had figured out everything but how to make the hoop spin on its own without an injection of external energy. He talked about emailing physics professors at universities in Istanbul and Ankara to no avail, and asked, could I perhaps contact someone back in Cambridge?

Soon we were on our way to Silvan. We walked the streets and saw the schoolyards he mentioned, and we stopped in a coffeehouse with the intent of talking to a few of Bawer's old acquaintances and neighbors. But only one acquaintance showed up, and he had little to say beyond a few *ezbe*r,[56] or rote, lines of Kurdish nationalist discourse. We left, and Bawer suggested that I might like to see the remains of an old water-powered stone flour mill on the outskirts of town and perhaps climb a hill to get a better sense of the city's layout. On the walk down a tree-lined road and up a path

[56] *Ezber* is a Persian-rooted word meaning literally from memory, but in pragmatic usage in Diyarbakır it is often used to refer disparagingly to the habit of some people to repeat the messages of Kurdish nationalism without thinking more carefully about their meanings or practical implementation, or to engage in self-critique (*öz eleştiri*).

flattened by sheep hooves and dotted with their droppings, we were joined by another friend of Bawer's, who talked (echoing the rural idyll described in an earlier chapter) of the "oxygen", the trees, the brook, the flocks, and the fresh air as the "true natural setting" for Kurds. He broke off a switch from a young willow tree, walked far ahead of us, and sang, in the open air and at the top of his lungs, a sung/spoken poem in Kurdish about an early 20th-century Kurdish rebellion against the nascent Turkish nation state. We passed a few cows in a pen, one of which had a collar of green, yellow and red: the colors of Kurdish nationalism. Bawer joked that in Silvan, even the cows are patriotic.[57]

At the peak of the hill, Bawer and I sat on the sun-yellowed grass while our companion took a stroll on his own, smoking, strolling along the sheep paths, and keeping on with his song. Bawer seized on the moment to make another proposition. He pointed to the remains of the Hasuni Caves in the distance, for centuries used as places of residence, worship, and work, but long abandoned. He explained that as a teenager he and his friends had thought of going into the caves to explore their depths, but could not muster the courage. The reason for his interest, it turned out, was the widespread myth of buried treasure—gold, in particular—in the depths of the caves. He told a string of stories about how his childhood passed with rumors of people finding pieces of gold

[57] Red, yellow, and green objects have an intriguing social life in southeastern Turkey, and across the country more generally. Newroz celebrations involve thousands and thousands of flags, handkerchiefs, and costumes in these colors. Weddings in the southeast often end in a string of cars driving through the city or town with people waving small red, yellow, and green handkerchiefs. Landscaping arrangements of flowers in these colors, as mentioned elsewhere, have, in Diyarbakır and in Ankara, attracted police attention and lawsuits. Small trinkets (earrings, bracelets, pins) in red, yellow, and green are created by political prisoners and sold in small shops in cities across the southeast. In 2009, when teaching in Istanbul, I observed a protest related to cultural and linguistic rights for Kurds where a group of young women were wearing red, yellow, and green football jerseys from a west African country (clear to everyone protesting, but presumably a good legal defense). And though I am unable to track down the precise reference, there was a newspaper article in the pro-Kurdish *Özgür Gündem* at some point during my fieldwork that featured a photograph of one of Hakkari's world-famous upside-down tulips (the image was clearly altered) that the article alleged had naturally bloomed in red, yellow, and green.

coins or jewelry and hiding the treasure away in their homes with the intent of finding a buyer, only to eventually get rid of the objects, fearing they might carry a curse and bring bad luck, and as before, he quickly came to the point: did I happen to know anyone with access to a ground penetrating radar machine? Would I be interested in going in on a treasure-hunting mission?

After our trip to Silvan, I lost contact with Bawer; he cut off contact with all of his friends, in fact, and rumors spread of his involvement in ever-shadier business ventures. Although his perpetual motion machine sketches were, at least in my experience, Bawer's own idiosyncratic preoccupation, his interest in buried treasure—"another city under the city", as one Diyarbakır shopkeeper put it to me—were rather widespread. I first heard of ground penetrating radar from Bawer, but by the time I left the city, the term had surfaced in at least half a dozen exchanges. One such instance recorded in my field notes happened during an interview with a shopkeeper in Japan Passage, a cluster of semi-legal electronics shops in Balıkçılarbaşı, an intersection at the economic heart of Diyarbakır's old walled city center. The shopkeeper in question dealt mostly in *kaçak* electronic goods, as did most of his neighboring shopkeepers—an open secret, like most *kaçak* marketplaces in the city. If you wanted to save on a digital camera or a cellular phone, most of them smuggled across the Iraqi or Syrian border, Japan Passage was the place. During the interview, the shopkeeper inquired delicately but with persistence and about my home academic department. How many archaeologists are there? And do they know how to use radar machines? Do they have access to them? I confessed ignorance to the finer details of his questions and, as it seemed (at the time, at least) tangential to the interview, I carried on and eventually left the shop without asking more about the

unexpected request. But as I came to hear more of these stories and was able to question friends about them, it became clear that what this shopkeeper and others had in mind was buried treasure, which, in and around Diyarbakır, usually refers to urban myths of Armenian gold left behind or buried at the last minute during the violent population evictions around World War I. A tailor in Suriçi I interviewed a number of times claimed not to believe in these myths and explained their ubiquity as nothing but fantasies of easy money, but in the same exchange, he also relayed a rumor about "a friend of a friend" who had occupied an abandoned historical home in the historic city center after having been displaced from a nearby village in the 1990s, and who, upon knocking down a wall, discovered a great deal of gold jewelry. The hope of finding buried treasure speaks to the same basic economic conditions that Bawer's sketches of a perpetual motion machine do: work scarcity.[58] However pipe-dreamish they may first appear, such acts of imagination have to be taken seriously as products of a political-economic context wherein building a viable livelihood future is a fraught venture.

A similar problematic is present in the widespread everyday chatter that surfaced often in this research regarding obtaining some sort of certificate. Certificates and certification are fascinating cultural objects and practices for economic anthropology, and should be approached through the same lens of estrangement and defamiliarization as anthropologists have viewed Kula exchange. One man I had interviewed about his work as a temporary worker in a canteen at the local university called me late one night and invited me to his home in Aziziye, which, the reader will recall from chapter two's

[58] This recalls Wacquant's work on the value of games of chance (1999) in the United States' urban geographies of displacement, dispossession, and relegation—or, in Wacquant's terminology, "advanced marginality" (2007).

profile of Z, is a neighborhood built almost entirely by the displaced. We sat in one room of his father's self-built two room home, smoking, chatting quietly by a small ceramic space heater, and drinking tea kept warm atop the heater, as his friend, a barbershop apprentice with long, meticulously styled hair, opened video after video on his cell phone of their performances as drummer and *saz* player, respectively, at neighborhood wedding ceremonies. "Mainly, I am a poet", the barbershop apprentice said, as he explained how the barbershop work was simply something to bring in some income. He sang and occasionally wrote songs for the three-man band, which played in wedding halls and in outdoor street weddings across the city. Otherwise quite reserved, the videos showed him singing and calling out to *halay* dancers with great self-assurance and joie de vivre.

That evening, the two young men said that they had wanted to set straight something they had heard a third mutual friend tell me in a recent interview, which they happened into at the tail end of our exchange. Their friend was explaining his belief that things were improving in the relations between Kurds and the Turkish state since Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party had come to rule. The canteen worker insisted that I should understand one thing and one thing only: the state did not care if Kurds starved. "*Herkes aç ama devlet umrunda değil*. Everyone's hungry but the state doesn't care." The lesson he drew from this condition was that responsibility fell on the efforts of individuals. When I inquired into exactly what he meant by this, conversation turned to what became the object of our exchange for the rest of the night: how he might secure some sort of certificate of his ability as a drummer that he thought might help him secure a working future. Together we thought of a handful of places to which he might turn.

"That paper, it's necessary, that way when you go to workplace, you have something to show."

Certification ties together matters of value, authorization, and the socioeconomic lives of documents. There are different kinds of certificates, with different criteria governing their issuance and different rules determining their exchange value. The kind of *sertifika* that the young drummer was after could be issued by an NGO for participation in a course. Such a certificate did not promise the same possibilities for livelihood as would, say, an *ustalık belgesi*, a certificate of mastery in a particular craft issued in Turkey by chambers of associated professionals (*odalar*) which is part of the documentation required for participation in the registered economy. Certificates of the sort he sought had limited purchase towards decent wage-earning positions. Unlike harder to come by documents such as diplomas, of which most people usually possess only a few, one could potentially have a wall or a CV full of certificates, as indeed a few civil servants I met did. Nevertheless, for young migrant men facing underemployment or unemployment, limited chances in formal education, and limited job security, a certificate of any sort held some promise of the possibility of another future.

## CONCLUSION: ON THE MUNDANE ROOTS OF POLITICAL STANCE

When read against chapters two and three, these last two chapters raise questions about the different ways in which displacement, dispossession, and the destabilization of livelihoods have played out across generations. If the loss of a viable way of getting by has left the older generation with memories of past viability and a sense of the untenable and unjust nature of the present, the same process has raised a different set of problems for the younger subjects of forced migration, whose concerns, while not entirely divorced

from the past, focused, to a degree unmatched in their elders, on the question of how to build a future and establish a viable working life in the city. More than resignation, energetic, imaginative, and sometimes youthfully fantastic searches for a way out of the dilemma of dispossession seemed to animate their daily lives.

One argument made in the previous chapter was that youth bulge theory and other such politically motivated presuppositions about how young people, especially young men, might act in conditions of limited economic opportunities and high joblessness, need to be replaced with ethnographically grounded understandings of actual acts and actual lives and livelihoods. What struck me consistently across this phase of ethnographic work was the sense in which young men's anxieties over establishing a future are deeply colored by the widespread perception of unjust and discriminatory barriers thought to block Kurds, qua Kurds, from meaningful inclusion—economic, political, cultural—in the wider nation state—and the sense of people that this may not matter, that it might be time to begin thinking of another horizon of political belonging within Turkey's borders yet beyond its policies of inclusive exclusion.

Many of the young men we met above questioned the substantive meaning of Kurdish belonging in Turkey with explicit reference to labor inequalities. The *simitçi*, for instance, viewed the rest of Turkey as dependent on dispossessed Kurdish labor, even as Kurdish laborers are frequently the targets of quotidian acts of discrimination when they travel beyond the southeast. "Truly, living standards in Diyarbakır are very hard. The southeast", he continued, searching for the right word, "is really a very poor, er, *a country,* yes, it's a country, because it's outside of Turkey. Turkey doesn't embrace it."

He continued on the theme of inequality, trying to illustrate it—in a mode reminiscent of chapter two—through the image of sharing food:

> We want to sit at your table. We want to eat from the food you eat, and you too eat from the food we eat. Why are you making discrimination? I mean, that's it, Turks, really, they always exclude us. And alongside that, the media, so as not to give us work in the west, to us—err, I mean, in the southeast, there are no opportunities for work, or if there are, they are really very few, very few in number. When we look, there are people on this street working for a five lira a day. Why? In the name of contributing to their own household. And the number of people in a house is at least seven to 10 people. I mean, you won't find less than seven. But if we didn't do their work, they would die from hunger. Really! If we didn't do the Turks' work, they would die from hunger. Because, today, er, be it their hazelnuts or their pistachios, their cotton, their this or that, Kurds do it all.

His assessment of the political economy of dispossessed Kurdish labor, based on his own work picking hazelnuts and cotton across Turkey, and in struggling to find work at a living wage in Diyarbakır, paints a picture of Kurds compelled into circuits of temporary and seasonal labor at low wages and being exploited by the rest of Turkey.

> Their aims are to keep us out of the west. Let me give an example, Alanya[59] [a Mediterranean city with a sizeable displaced Kurdish population]…They gathered people from [various cities in western Turkey] to attack and drive out Kurds from Alanya. I mean, these are real things. They do what they can to drive Kurds out of the west. They bombed and burned their shops, they burned their houses.
>
> We are always ground down, we are always working, but they are always benefitting. Even though they shoot at us, we still go and do their labor for them, because we have to, we have no choice, we must fill our bellies and clothe our families. We must look after our own. And without that labor, that won't happen. They shoot us and kill us, and we go and do their work…That's how it is brother, how else shall I put it?

Such stories of unequal treatment in trying to sell one's labor proliferate. The son of one of the older men we met in the previous chapter described spending his childhood going

[59] Presumably a reference to the October 1992 events in Alanya, wherein after a slain soldier's body was brought back to the city for burial a mob gathered and attacked a number of shops and houses known to be Kurdish owned. See Milliyet Gazetesi (1992).

to the Black Sea to harvest hazelnuts—a common job for dispossessed Kurds, and one that virtually every young man we met in this chapter had talked about doing. He recalled one incident from his time there:

> One thing I'll never forget in Sakarya, people used to go and come from the city to their village [on minibuses], the villagers there. Never was there a search [of the vehicle by the gendarmerie], nothing, as if the state didn't exist in their lives. Once when we were harvesting hazelnuts, I looked at the other people working. The women were just like us, they too were villagers, but they were Turkish villagers. I got on the minibus at night, and one woman, she looked at me in such a way that if I were a dog or a non-believer she'd probably look upon me more lightly, just like that. I paused and said, *yaw* what am I? What am I not? At that moment I wanted to die.

The same young man, now working as an errand boy in a coffeehouse for well below minimum wage, repeatedly underlined in our exchange a commonly held thesis in Diyarbakır: that keeping Kurds impoverished was part of an orchestrated political project to depoliticize the southeast. He claimed that, though he wanted to play a greater role in the ongoing political movement for Kurdish liberation, what he said was one of the main conditions for the possibility of organized politics, the ability to envision another future, was, he felt, robbed from him and his peers, who he said were too caught up in the day-to-day struggle to get by to think beyond present worries.

Part of this widely shared sense of inequality, of living in another Turkey, is generated out of work experiences. But part of it, too, comes from less easily classifiable experiences—the ordinary events of everyday life. A creative conflation of experiences in different aspects of daily life makes up this sense of difference and discrimination. One evening, for instance, a young man of around 20, the nephew of a *çavuş*—a word that means, in this context, a middleman linking seasonal migrant laborers with factories and fields—had just come back from Erzurum, a city some 150 miles north-northeast of

Diyarbakır, where his father had arranged for him to work in a small cheese factory, and had decided to visit his friends, who hung out many nights on stools outside the aforementioned neighborhood *bakkal* in Aziziye. He had no complaints about the labor itself; he had, since coming of age, been working in this or that seasonal agricultural-related job, all off-the-books. He further expressed a sentiment that many young migrant workers echoed: someone has to do it.[60]

The job involved collecting milk from the dwindling number of his family's relatives still living in their partially evacuated village on the slopes of Karacadağ, driving it to a dairy processing facility in Erzurum, where his uncle had friends, having spent some time there before he left university due to political tensions around the time of the 1980 military coup, and working for several weeks to process the milk into cheese before selling it back in Diyarbakır. His uncle, it seems, had grown curious about the political climate of the city on this last journey and had talked one night, with his host family, about paying a visit to the DTP (now BDP) party headquarters. The host reportedly urged him against it, fearing negative responses from the police and from neighbors. But the uncle did eventually visit party headquarters, and shortly after he and his nephew were asked to vacate the house. They were also suddenly charged higher than normal prices in the neighborhood corner store when purchasing cigarettes, and were made to feel unwelcome in the neighborhood coffeehouse.

When I expressed surprise at these forms of everyday discrimination and asked if they were particular to Erzurum, a friend of the cheese maker dismissed my surprise.

[60] Paul Willis might appreciate the tension that surfaced here, as in so many exchanges with young working men from displaced families, between, in Willis's terms, "penetration" and the "reproduction of inherited structural relations" (1977).

"You don't know. We ate plenty of punches", he said, smiling broadly and pointing across the two-lane road dividing where we sat from a nearby cluster of apartment complexes where people with regular incomes lived—a comment that brought smiles and nods of agreement from his friends. Particularly in the early days of migration, they told me, venturing to the other side of the road to hang out on its park benches, stroll its streets, play on its soccer field, or even to simply walk on the sidewalk on that side of the road was, for a young man from the migrant neighborhood, sufficient to attract the attention of the police, and to then be brought to the nearest station and roughed up. The cheese maker pointed to the other side of the road and said, "If that's Europe, this is Africa."

Another young man—call him Ali—chimed in with his own take on everyday discrimination in the city. He pointed to his small, inexpensive Şahin sedan, which had dark tinted windows and silver stickers spelling out various kitsch phrases ("The more the days pass, the more I understand why babies cry at birth"). Ali was comparatively fortunate; he had a certificate of mastery in plumbing. A few years ago he was working in Istanbul and making good money. However, the construction crew he had gone to work for disbanded, he could no longer find work, and thus could no longer afford to live in Istanbul. He returned to Diyarbakır to his family, and had found work in the city, though at a significant pay cut. Meanwhile, he used some of his earnings in Istanbul to buy his car. With it, he picked up friends and cousins from Aziziye and drove them to coffeehouses in other neighborhoods where they could smoke and play games in peace, knowing their older brothers would not be there. Or more often, after work many nights, he would enjoy what he described as his biggest pleasure in life: opening a fresh pack of

cigarettes, turning on his favorite music, and driving slowly around the outskirts of the city, stopping at certain lookout points to enjoy views of the winding Tigris and the old city walls. But he complained that the police would frequently stop his vehicle and do thorough searches of the car. In part, he chalked this up to the model of car, which, particularly with its tinted windows and stickers, was indexical of young lower-class men. He also cursed his lack of foresight while in Istanbul, where he could have bought a car with non-Diyarbakır plates (on the troubles of having a Diyarbakır number 21 license plate and the lengths that people go to acquire a car with other plates, see Diken 1998).

Ali said that he had heard from relatives who had immigrated to Holland that in the EU, borders had been eliminated. In Diyarbakır, though, "in my own homeland", Ali complained that he couldn't go a week without being pulled over by the police and having his vehicle searched. "Here, there's nothing but borders."[61] When he made these

[61] On the evening that this young man shared these stories of being pulled over and having every inch of his vehicle searched at least once a week, there were a few young men present who had arrived on foot from the neighboring salaried settlement (the Europe to the cheese maker's Africa), looking to buy a few bottles of cola and some sunflower seeds from a nearby *bakkal* for an evening of hanging out on benches and chatting in the moderate weather. They sat down on the stools on the sidewalk where the sedan driver and I sat, and listened to Ali's stories. One of the young men, a confident and articulate high school graduate who had taken a year off to study and sit the national university entrance exam a second time, unsatisfied with the choice of departments available to him after his initial scores, showed visible irritation about such accounts of mistreatment and discrimination against Kurds purportedly because they were Kurds. He clarified that his own family was descended from the few thousand Turcophone Bulgarians who were purposefully resettled in the Kurdish-majority southeast of Turkey in the early years of the republic, around the same time that a number of Kurds from Dersim and other southeastern geographies were being relocated to western Turkey, all part of an explicit project to assimilate Turkish national identity in Kurdish people and geographies. He insisted that Kurds are not the only ones who suffered, and who have been discriminated against. His grandfather, he told us, was driven off the land the state granted him by a powerful local Kurdish landlord, but before this happened his grandfather apparently sensed something afoot and sold nearly all of his animals and crops, and with that money opened a small shop in the neighborhood of Bağlar in Diyarbakır, close to the train station. Thanks to his practical intelligence, he said, the family was saved from the poverty of living under a landlord, but today, he said, he feels out of place in Bağlar. He told a story about trying to help an older woman carry her shopping bags from the market to her home in Bağlar, but when she realized that he didn't speak Kurdish, she apparently cursed him and asked, What kind of a Diyarbakırite doesn't speak Kurdish? Similarly, he talked about visiting relatives in Bursa, a city in the west of Turkey with a large number of migrants from the southeast, and

remarks, I happened to have responded with a memory from one of my earliest trips to Diyarbakır when, on a long bus ride from Ankara, next to a retired teacher with a history of leftist Kurdish political involvement in the various movements preceding the PKK, we had awakened around sunrise outside of Malatya to find military officers collecting passports. He leaned over as we were waiting to get our documents back and said, "So now you understand we're in a different country." I shared this remark with the young man in the white sedan, and he replied, "*Valla*, the man's right."

Thus for young men, if in a different mode than their parents, experiences of livelihood and of everyday life in the wake of displacement and dispossession are perceived and rendered through discourse into everyday signs of injustice and inequality. They, too, practice the creative conflation of economic and political life in contemporary Diyarbakır that is an overarching social reality in the contemporary city, and that is at the heart of this study. In this chapter, we see some of the additional ways in which ordinary daily objects are appropriated—certificates, ground-penetrating radar, perpetual motion machines—and made to play a part in moral and political condemnation and the articulation of political stance of dissent towards past and present policies of the state in the wake of displacement and dispossession.

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meeting a group of young men from Diyarbakır, whom he claims to have asked for a light and tried to engage in conversation only to find himself threatened with a beating when they learned he wasn't Kurdish. Whether or not these stories are apocryphal is beside the point. I am more interested in them as evidence of a symbolic habit in Turkey, surprisingly common among otherwise sympathetic figures, of refusing to recognize Kurdish experience as exceptional. It is a trite way of thinking among leftists who lived through the 1980 military coup in Turkey, and one that I heard a number of times during my fieldwork, on trips to Istanbul for library research or when journalists or delegations visited Diyarbakır, to recognize that Kurds have suffered, but to insist that this was no more than any other social or political sub-group in Turkey.

# CONCLUSION

This dissertation has approached urban livelihoods in the wake of displacement and dispossession through a focus on discourses about 'the economy', or more specifically, about the practical challenges involved in remaking livelihoods after dispossession. I have argued that the ways in which people interpret and give meaning to their economic lives is an important part of the everyday generation of political meaning in contemporary Diyarbakır.

This claim is important, I think, because it points to a need, in the study of Kurds in Turkey, to push the analysis of politics in the context of the so-called Kurdish question beyond the predominant concern with those designated to speak in the name of 'politics'—elected officials, people with claims to expertise or qualification—and towards an approach to politics that is closer to Ranciere's use of the word: the struggle of those who are not 'supposed' to speak on such matters, their irruption into everyday space of struggle, their efforts to make their presence and their demands visible and sayable in questioning the order of the "distribution of the sensible" (Ranciere 2010). And, we should add, it suggests a need to do so in ways that move beyond alarmist accounts. Rather than assume we know what people subjected to injurious political histories and living in conditions of economic relegation think or how they act, I have tried to suggest that we should simply listen to what they have to say.

The constant talk about matters of livelihood in the southeast seems to me an instance of ordinary displaced Kurds insisting that their experiences and their fight for viable livelihoods and fair work conditions not be rendered beyond the sensible. It is also is, I think, an instance of what David Graeber has described as the politics of value—

active deliberation over "what it is that makes life worth living" (2001:88)—at work, as an integral part of the lively conversational life of a city where political critique is an everyday activity.

I want to return to the overarching argument of this dissertation in light of the research presented above, and to revisit the argument outlined at the outset of this study regarding the political significance of discourse about the economy. There are at least two senses in which I think this discourse matters, and is deserving of scholarly attention. One has to do, as I suggested above, with expanding the political scope of contemporary scholarship on the so-called Kurdish problem. The other has to do with the significance of economic life at this conjuncture in Diyarbakır's history.

On the first matter, one reason for taking this approach has to do with the contributions of a growing body of scholarship on the Kurdish question. As Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Akkaya note(2012:2), much of the available literature in Kurdish studies has focused on official discourse and security policy as a means of understanding the politics of the present. Understanding official pronouncements and military practices is no doubt an important element in making sense of the history and evolution of events in Kurdish Turkey's recent history. But one wonders if this captures 'the political' in all, or even in its most important, senses. In this study, I drew on another approach to politics, one wherein the political is at base a matter of who has a say in the determination of a particular arrangement of the social or the communal. Politics happens, in this framework, when the non-elected force their way into the aesthetic space of visibility and audibility. Akkaya and Jongerden are right to suggest that Kurdish studies could use to pay more attention to politics beyond the sense of state officials and military acts, but

could we also add to this, beyond the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) officials, Democratic Society Congress members, and PKK leaders? This is a more complicated matter, as in many ways these groups are themselves the result of a politics of irruption that altered who has a say in the so-called Kurdish question. BDP, for instance, is central to the project of trying to build autonomous democratic spaces within the existing space of the Turkish-state, a project that does not rely on state official acts of recognition—what Akkaya and Jongerden summarize under the term radical democracy. The evolution of the PKK's vision after the 2000s, in other words, can be seen as example of "the potential of social movements to alter power structures in a given polity" (Gambetti 2009: 44). This situation would seem to be close to Ranciere's idea of politics. But is there not another space of politics to consider as well, the analysis of which might complement the growing number of studies of Kurdish parties and civil society organizations? Here I have in mind the politics of ordinary experiences of ordinary Kurds. I use 'ordinary' not in a populist way that celebrates the ordinary as the source of what is good and true, but in the simple sense of people not occupying a position that officially designates them to speak in the name of politics.

One way to read this dissertation, then, is a call for greater attention to popular instantiations of politics, in Ranciere's sense, in the study of Kurds in Turkey. "Politics and police", writes Ranciere, "refer…to two distributions of the sensible, to two ways of framing a sensory space, of seeing or not seeing common objects in it, of hearing or not hearing in it subjects that designate them or reason in their relation" (2010:92). The fact that the people I met in Diyarbakır so often used the medium of everyday speech to fill it with references to the perceived wrongs of displacement and dispossession and the

injustices of inclusive exclusion can be read as an effort to render these experiences a more salient part of the sensory space of post-displacement Diyarbakır.

Which leads us to the second matter. It seems to me that the political future of the city has much to do with how people's claims for more equitable opportunities and more jobs at decent pay will be answered. This is not to confirm the ruling party's thesis that the Kurdish question is at heart a matter of economic development stripped of politics—as in the ex-governor of Diyarbakır's 2008 remarks that "the agenda of the people is economic; the agenda is sustenance. Any other claims are political" (see Day 2008). Rather, I mean to underscore that the economy is always already a space of politics, a space of defining the contours of a particular arrangement of the social. Such a *political* economy is not the only element of the Kurdish struggle, but I want to suggest that it is an important one, and deserves perhaps more careful attention than it receives. Scholars may be reticent to approach the question of economic life in the southeast, given the degree to which economic matters are associated with state efforts to silence or dismiss the politics of Kurdish dissensus as irrelevant to the 'more important' matter of humanitarianism: Kurds as apolitical humanitarian subjects, whose political claims will disappear if only economic development can be brought to the southeast and more jobs can be created. To that end, I have tried to provide a way of approaching the economy as always already a terrain of politics.

Still, questions remain as to the extent to which, in this iteration of the research, I have been able to achieve what I set out to do. I have tried to show how my interlocutors in Diyarbakır, in discussing matters of economic life—unstable jobs, low pay, unsecure futures, the lackluster nature of labor in the city versus labor in the country, even with all

the latter's inequities—insisted on linking these discussions to questions of inequality, perceived abuses of power, and a whole range of other events identified as unjust. They insisted that economic life can and should not be divorced from questions of power, morality, and justice, and in so doing, they staked out a political stance of dissensus. But would a more robust argument not require further research into the question of how these discourses circulate and are performed in settings beyond talking to the anthropologist? I tried in the introduction to suggest that talk about the economy is not a question of playing it safe, but is a ubiquitous popular language of politics. To strengthen this argument, however, there is a need for further research into how politicized accounts of the economic operate at a wider social scale. At the same time, there is a need to show, at a more linguistically fine-tuned level of analysis, how these accounts of the economy are made socially legible and culturally convincing. I tried to open these questions in the third chapter, where food signs are analyzed in rhetorical terms. But there is more to do along these lines. Beyond the mere insistence on the inseparability of the economic and political, there is a need to dig more deeply into how, at a subtler level, discourse about the economy works as politics.

A final line of questioning begging for further consideration in later iterations of this research has to do with geography, with questions of space. Readers of this study have pointed out that while geography—specifically, police acts that transform geographies—is an implicit theme throughout this ethnography, there is little explicit theoretical discussion of geography and space. I have come to agree with this criticism, yet I've done so too late in the game to make the theoretical overhauls that this would call for. Doing so in later iterations of this work might resolve my analytic discomfort,

voiced in the introduction, with Ranciere's defense of his thesis that politics is, with Aristotle, at base a matter of speech, of language. Who can engage in debate, in speech: these are the critical questions for Ranciere, whereas exciting work, both in geography and in some of the interdisciplinary work under the rubric of so-called 'new materialisms' (Bennett 2010, Coole and Frost 2010), raises important questions about the need to push not just beyond the linguistic and conceptual, but beyond the human to understand the constitution and dynamics of politics.

That said, the research in its current state does, I think, provide a novel approach to economic life (dispossession and livelihoods by way of discourse), and a cogent argument as to why looking, at this conjuncture, at the politics of economic life in Diyarbakır matters. As the project of actualizing radical democracy unfolds, many of us will look on with great interest on the economic transformation of Diyarbakır and other southeastern cities. Kurdish political leaders have written a declaration, mentioned earlier in this study, that outlines the vision as to the kind of economic arrangement they would like to see emerge from contemporary negotiations. Whatever one's stance, there are undeniably some ideas worth considering in this document: for instance, the rebuilding of rural villages for forced migrants who wish to return, yet along the lines of ecologically sound farming practices that would both reverse the damages to the land in the southeast caused by dam building and large-scale industrial agriculture and provide locally-sourced, healthy food; the restructuring of a tax system that places heavy burdens on the working class while many top earners find ways to evade giving a part of their income to the state; the encouragement of very small-scale manufacturing, and the rejection of large-scale monopolistic enterprises. Yet as the document writers themselves

readily admit, most of these ideas remain at the stage of abstract proposals, with the practical means of implementation rather under-thought. For instance, how exactly would a ground-up, locally based democratic movement—even if, as is the case in Diyarbakır and many southeastern municipalities, it has a sympathetic ear in local government and parliamentary representatives—effect an alteration of national tax policies? Who would pay for the reconstruction of villages (no meager price)? And to whom would the organic agricultural goods be marketed, if, considering the high input costs of organic farming, it is unlikely that most of the people who shop from agricultural street markets in Diyarbakır—which is where many in the city shop for produce—would be willing or able to pay for organic products?

Working out practical answers to the details of these proposals would seem to be a crucial step in addressing the important matter of rebuilding economic life in southeastern Turkey. If the Kurdish movement is committed at a deep level to what it now claims—radical democracy that initiates imaginative projects without waiting for state policies of recognition (with all their complications and limits) and decision making at a local scale—these proposals are in need of grounding in the intertwined material and semiotic conditions of the city's displaced, dispossessed economic geographies.

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